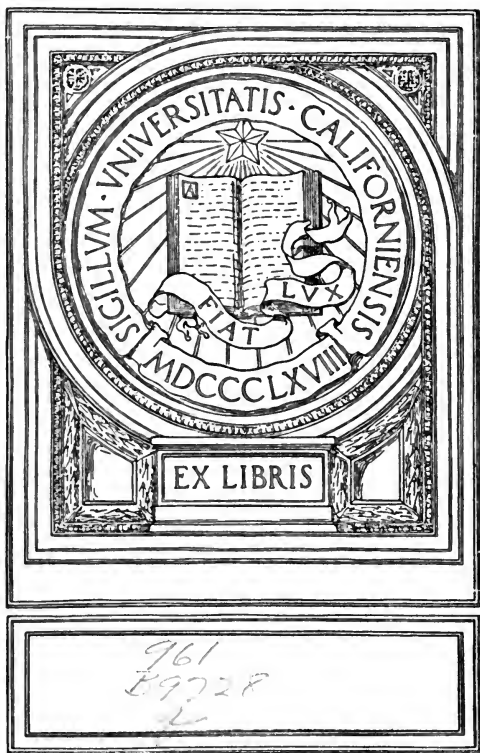


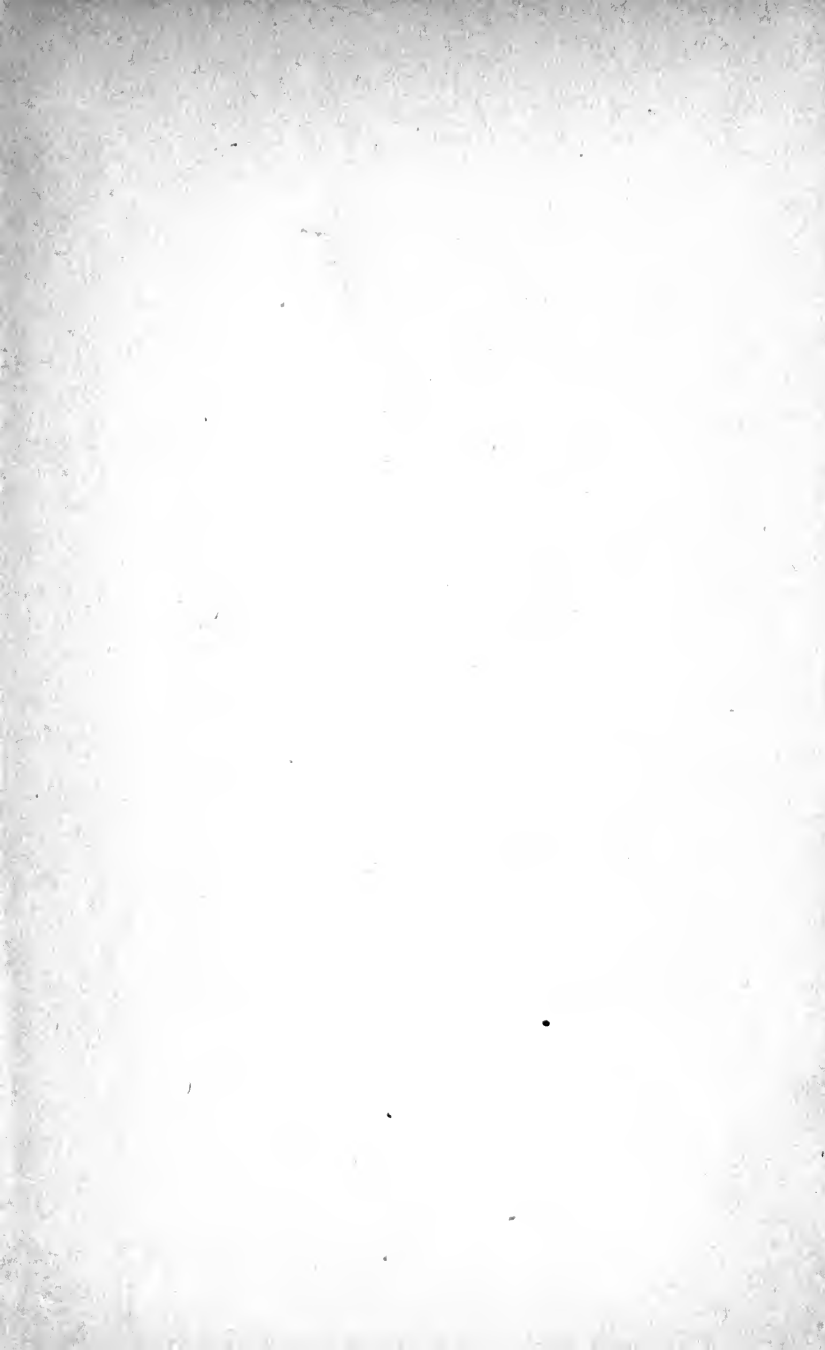


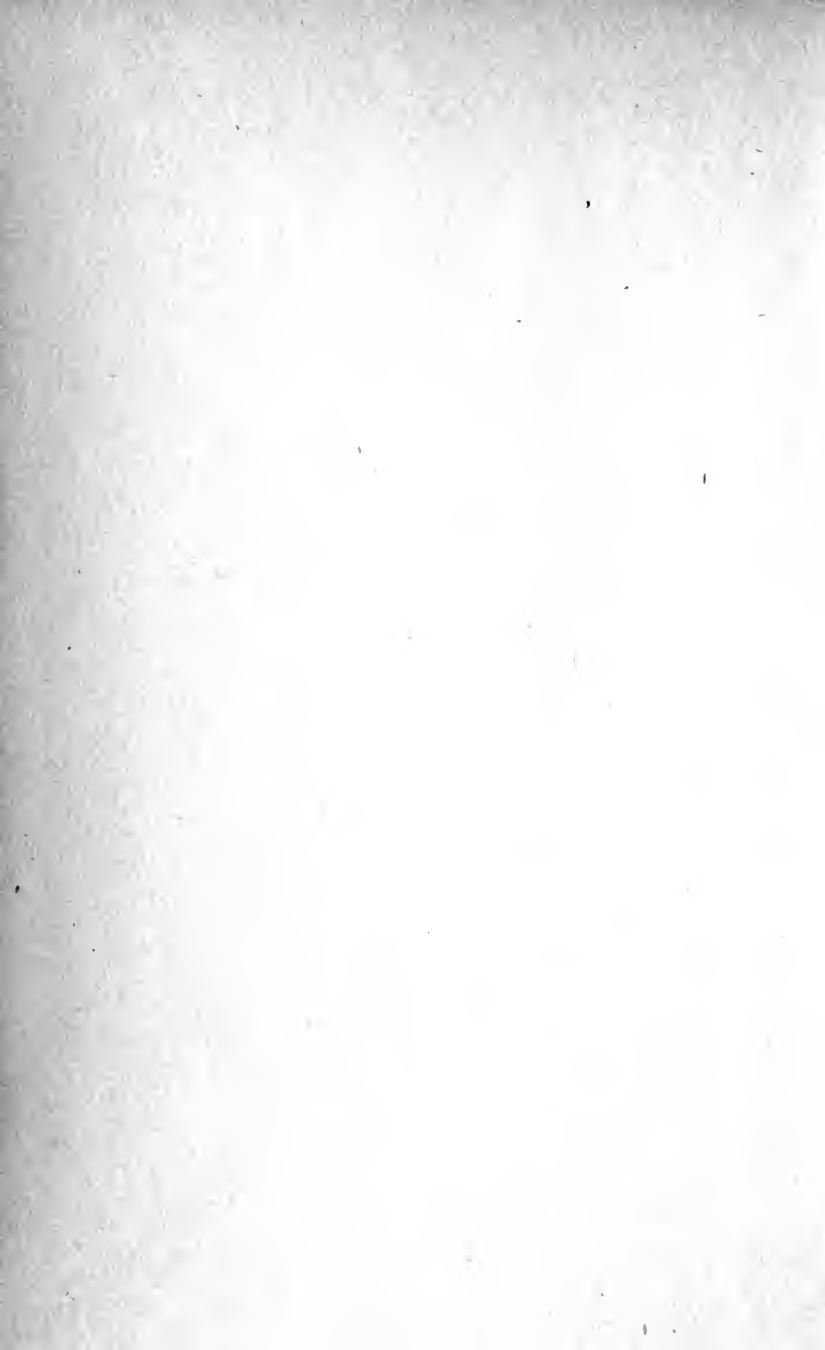
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“Q”

“Q”

BY
KATHARINE NEWLIN BURT

AUTHOR OF “THE BRANDING IRON,” “THE RED LADY”
“HIDDEN CREEK,” AND “SNOW-BLIND”



BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

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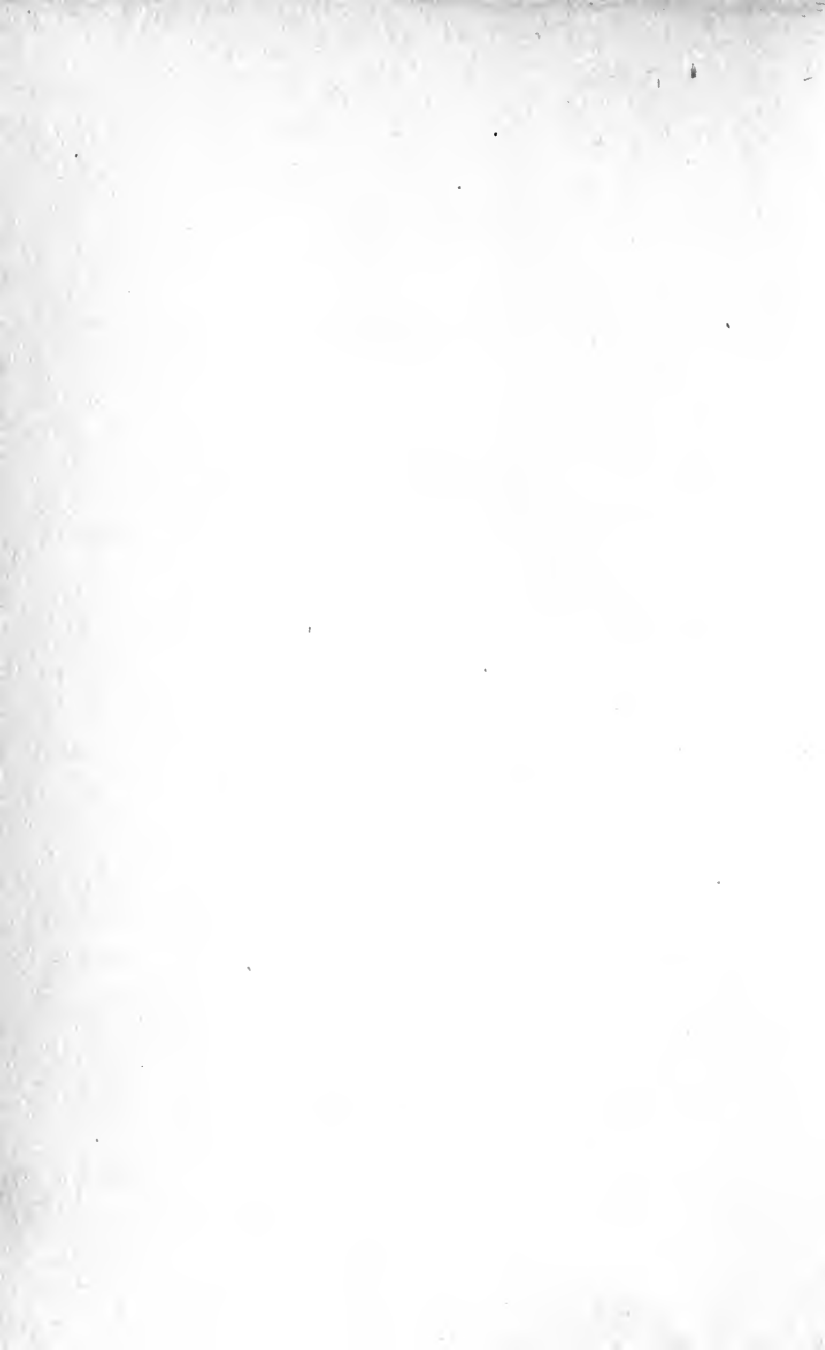
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TO THE
AUTHOR

The Riverside Press
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TO
CALIFORNIA CAL
WHO I AM SURE
WILL NEVER READ IT

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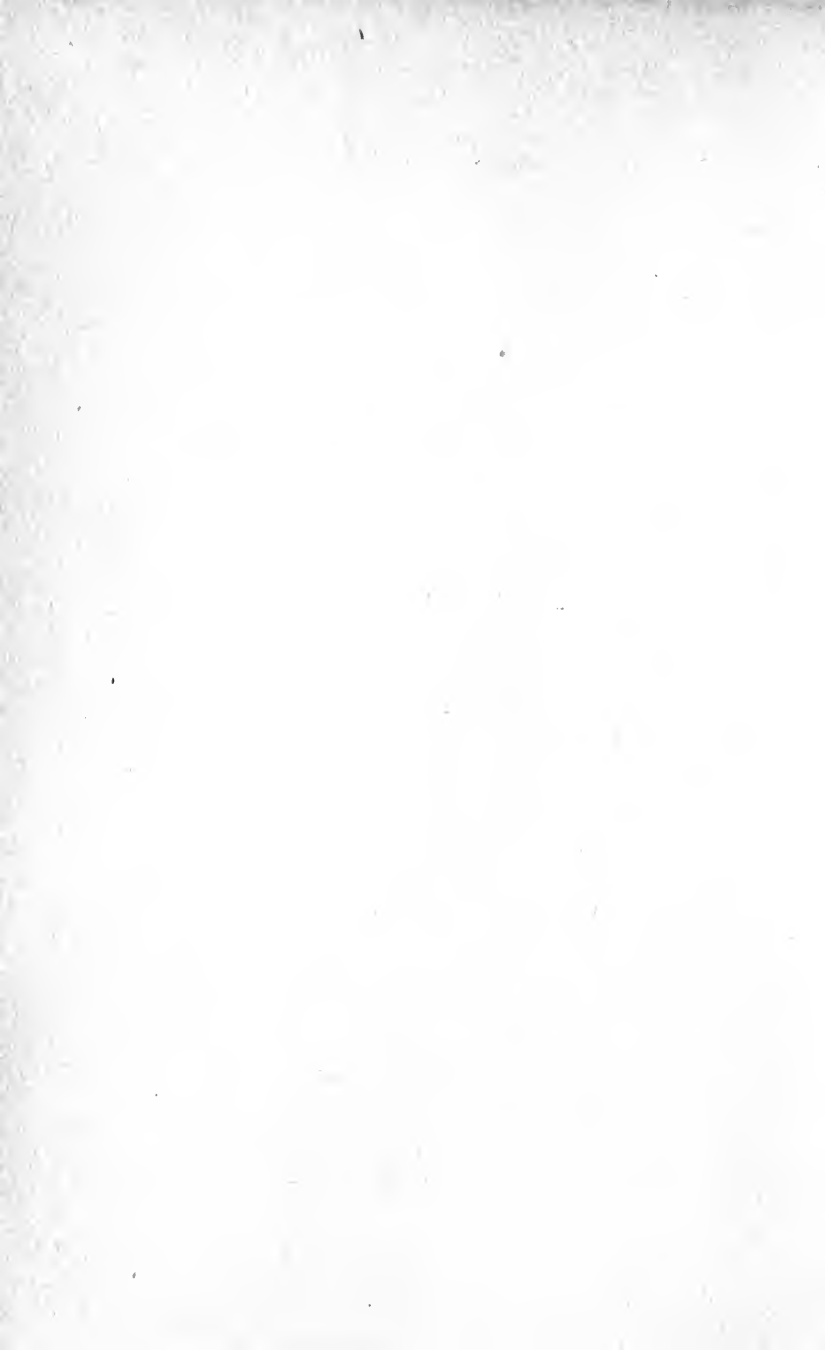


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“Q”



“Q”

CHAPTER I

A QUEER CUSTOMER

MISS MARIANA BENTON, very slim, very languid, very much waved as to hair and very much manicured as to fingers, minding the desk at the River Hotel, was twice aware of a gently spoken question before she felt constrained to remove her gaze from an object of stronger interest.

“When you get real weary, lady,” the gentle voice began a third time, and now there was a drawl in its gentleness, “of gazing at the blond feller that runs the buzz-box, I’d sure be obliged if you’d transfer a little of your attention to me.”

At this she did — meaning to look the speaker over at her leisure. But she stopped at his eyes. They seemed to see all the little bones of her head and all the little nerves that ran through the gray matter and all the sensations and comments that were being carried along these nerves; but, besides seeing all these things, the eyes seemed at the same time to be looking quite through to a point miles and broad miles behind her, so that she was appallingly conscious of the infinitesimal smallness of those afore-

mentioned bones and nerves and the utter insignificance of their devices. For the rest — the eyes were very gray, very cool, very brilliant, and — beyond all Miss Benton's experience of eyes — direct.

Quite involuntarily and before she was conscious of meaning to speak at all, she found herself stammering, "Oh, I beg pardon!" — and it was the first time in her capacity of clerk that she had ever made even a gesture of apology. At the same time she blushed and, dropping her confused gaze, she pushed the hotel register forward, dipped a pen into the ink-well and handed the holder to the owner of the extraordinary eyes. He took it with a certain deliberateness. The hand was brown and well-kept and muscular. It laid hold of the pen and cramped itself awkwardly about it. A sleek head with hair of a nondescript sun-bleached brown and a pair of powerful shoulders bent over the hand. With a royal disregard for lines, and limitations, the stranger wrote — wrote slowly, wrote laboriously, wrote very large. Fascinated by the great expenditure of force in his manipulation of the spluttering pen, the girl followed the sprawling letters with her look —

Q. T. Kinwydden

"Residence?" she murmured.

The pen hung for an instant in suspense. Then it was laid carefully aside.

"If anybody asks you where I come from, lady, you can tell 'em from 'all over the West.'"

Mariana jumped as the eyes were raised again.

"I want a room and a bath, ma'am," said Q. T. Kinwydden. "Hot and cold water runnin' out of a tap and electric lights you can push on and off with your trigger finger, savvy?"

The blond elevator boy had moved two or three steps closer. He had prominent eyes, but at the moment they were more than prominent. They bulged. His jaw hung loose.

Mariana took down a key. "Room 90, Bill," she said. "The gentleman's bag is over there by the door."

"I'll pack my own stuff, thanks to you just the same," said the new guest. He walked with his bag into the elevator. During the ascent he shut his eyes and clenched his hands; also, he murmured something under his breath.

"What say?" asked the boy.

"Nothin' it would do you any good to hear, son," was the answer.

Bill disembarked on the fourth floor, his passenger stepping out with a nervousness exaggerated, it would seem, for his own private amusement.

"Does she stay there till you get back?" he asked, eyeing the elevator as one eyes a fascinating enemy.

Bill gaped and nodded.

"It's sure wonderful."

The long hall was carpeted in worn and faded red, the walls needed repapering, the woodwork needed repainting. For that, Bill's uniform needed renovating, and it would not have injured his blondness to shave or to wash back of his ears. The door of Room 90 was

opened and a cubic square of stiffly furnished space was offered to Q. T. Kinwydden's occupancy.

“Where's your baggage, sir?” inquired Bill.

The guest set down his bag in the middle of the brown figured carpet and pointed at it. “Here, ‘sir,’” said he.

“Your trunks, I mean, sir.”

“I'm agoin' out to catch me up a trunk after supper, ‘sir.’” He looked at Bill. “You waitin' for a tip, ‘sir’?”

Bill blushed.

“All right, ‘sir,’ you're sure agoin' to capture one. What's this? Two bits? Here you are, son — for your courage and energy in runnin' the buzz-box.”

Bill took the tip and went out. A novel sensation of shame possessed him. He wished he had n't taken the tip, but he could not understand the cause for so inexplicable a wish. Bill rubbed his back hair, which needed cutting, and went into the elevator. “Queer customer,” he said and sucked in his lips.

The customer did conduct himself queerly enough in sober truth. He went quickly to the wall near the door after Bill had closed it, and there he pressed first a white button, then a black, studying meanwhile with huge gravity and interest the alternating effect on the globe in the ceiling. He did this about fifty times. Then he sauntered into the bathroom and turned the bathtub handle labeled “Hot.” When a cloud of steam rose he shook his head.

“Never fails!” he muttered. “It's sure wonderful.”

He left the water running and returned to the bedroom. He raised a green and shabby shade and looked down on the main street of Sluypenkill. There was a garage opposite. An automobile stood by the curb. The street was lined with hideous square buildings of frame and brick, small hardware, dry-goods and stationers' shops, a liberal sprinkling of saloons. Beyond, the roofs of the town climbed down to the broad and bright expanse of the Hudson River and up to the base of a round mountain disfigured by a funicular railway. Across the river, there was a larger and perhaps an uglier town bristling with factory chimneys and church steeples. Q. T. Kinwydden gazed for a long time at this prospect, ending with a minute scrutiny of the nearest saloon, and began to whistle to himself.

"It's a cross between Sugar City and Oily Corners — and no compliment to either," he said. He dropped the shade and prepared himself for a bath.

The hours for dinner were printed on a small card, stuck into the mirror above the dressing-table. At about the middle hour, Kinwydden appeared in the lobby. He had walked down the stairs. He advanced to the desk.

"Can you tell me, ma'am," he asked, and this time he had Mariana's prompt and complete attention, "where's your handiest school?"

She repeated his last three words with noiseless motions of her lips.

"School for learnin'?" he explained patiently.

“The — the public school is — is just around the corner, sir.”

“That ’d be about it, I reckon. Say, who can I see about the lessons you get there?”

“Why — why — ” Mariana ran a pencil in and out of her front waves, “see about lessons — ? Why, I guess — yes, Miss Sherman would be the one. She’s teacher for the third grade. She lives here in the hotel. I’ll introduce you to her after dinner. She and Miss Winters sit over in the bay in the dining-room. You’ll see them.”

But when Q. T. Kinwydden came into the dining-room and seated himself modestly and quickly at the nearest empty table, he saw no one but the waitress that advanced upon him — a tall young waitress, deep-bosomed and dark-eyed, as unconscious of her beauty, it appeared, as a young tree, moving in her black-and-white uniform, through a clatter of dishes and orders, as though she were walking through some fairy forest, enchanted and alone. A face sad with a romantic sadness that cleared all its lines and contours of vulgarity, subdued its vivid tints to a veiled mysterious glamour of remoteness.

Q’s experience of “biscuit-shooters” was intimate and fairly extensive. They had played the leading feminine rôles in most of his contacts with civilization. To his mind this girl became the Queen of Biscuit-Shooters. And he spoke his mind.

“By God!” he said, “if you are n’t the handsomest, classiest woman I ever saw.”

She blushed vividly and her face filled with charming amusement. “Order, sir?”

"Fetch me anything you like; I'll take it lyin' down."

She brought him a plate of cold thin tomato soup. By that time he had discovered Miss Sherman and Miss Winters dining together in the bay window of the room. He carefully inspected them. They were eating sadly and fastidiously. One was thin and sweet and pale. She sat as though she had a back-ache, and the other was strong and ruddy with dimples and reddish curly hair.

"I'd 'a' knowed them for schoolmarms anywheres," Kinwydden confided to the waitress. "Ain't it funny how the work earmarks 'em all alike?"

The head waiter, a short squat man with a pimpled and perspiring face, obviously disapproved of the River Hotel's latest guest. He dodged about, polishing glasses angrily as though they were weapons in his armory.

Kinwydden lingered over his meal until the schoolteachers had finished theirs. As they passed his table, he rippled quickly to his feet.

"Ma'am," he said.

They both stopped and they both crimsoned. The head waiter circled nearer, making little buzzing sounds of vexation in his throat.

"Which of you is schoolmarm for the third grade?" asked Kinwydden gently. His respect for them was so great and so apparent that Miss Sherman recovered her self-possession and smiled.

"I am," she said. "Can I do anything for you?"

“Yes, ma’am. I’m seeking information about school learnin’.”

Both ladies looked surprised. “Come into the sitting-room out here,” said Miss Sherman. “You come, too, please, Miss Winters. Now” — as they all three entered the stiff and varnished room — “tell me just what you want to know.”

Q. T. Kinwydden turned his extraordinary eyes from one lady to the other. Miss Sherman was suddenly conscious of a warm sensation of motherliness. The young man stood gracefully, gravely, shyly, the color deep in his bronze cheeks.

“Readin’ and writin’ and arithmetic,” he said in his gentlest voice.

He paused. Neither of his listeners spoke.

“Geography and History and Poetry and Literature — ”

“Languages alive and dead,” he concluded.

Miss Sherman drew a long breath. Miss Winters had walked rather quickly over to a window and turned her face away. Miss Sherman took two steps sideways and sat down. She motioned Q. T. Kinwydden to another chair and smiled at him. Her dimples deepened.

“Now I think I understand,” she said. “You have a son — ”

“No, ma’am. I’m a bachelor. Must you be a married man to get in?”

“Oh — Oh, no! You mean — you really mean, Mr. — er — ”

“Kinwydden.”

“Mr. — er — ”

“Kinwydden. Q. T. Kinwydden.”

“Mr. Kinwydden, you mean — *Yourself?*”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“You mean you want to enter the public school to study all those subjects?”

“Yes, ma’am.” He was leaning forward slightly, his elbows on his knees, his eyes lifted anxiously to her. “Ain’t it possible?” he asked.

“W-why — I don’t know, Mr. — er — ”

“Kinwydden. I sometimes wish it was easier myself. It ain’t rightly mine. It was wished onto me.” His smile was by far the most disarming movement that Miss Sherman had ever seen on any human countenance. It broke up the rather set and grim gravity of his face, took a dozen hard years from his age, and showed a pleasant row of white and even teeth. It was like the laying by of a piece of defensive armor, perhaps the lifting of a visor.

“Well, Mr. Kinwydden, it might be possible. But I really would n’t advise it. I surmise you have not been able to complete your education?”

“I have n’t been able to begin it, ma’am.”

“Well, it seems to me better, if you can afford it, to take private lessons from a teacher.”

“Oh, I ain’t afeared of the little boys,” smiled Kinwydden.

“No, that is n’t what I mean. I think you’d learn better and quicker. You see, a mature mind gets over the ground much faster — ”

“Mine won’t, ma’am. It’ll be all slide rock and down timber to me — learnin’.”

“But if it’s going to be harder for you than for a child, then even more advisable I should think it for you to have a private tutor — or” — a sudden illumination brightened her kind and dimpled countenance. She turned to Miss Winters. “Oh, Grace,” she cried, “why not a pupil for Miss Grinscoombe?”

There was a sudden silence in the room. On Miss Winters’s part it was caused by her view of Kinwydden’s face, which had turned white. Before she spoke, it blazed.

“Miss Heloise Grinscoombe?” he asked slowly.

There was a flurry of apology. “Oh, no, indeed. Of course not! Indeed, no! Not Miss Heloise Grinscoombe. Not Miss Selda Grinscoombe’s adopted niece. Not *the* Miss Grinscoombe out at Grinscoombe Manor. No. No. No. Hardly would *she* be looking for a pupil.”

“My mistake,” said the inquirer. His glow had left him and he had lowered his eyes. “I did n’t know there was two of ’em.”

“But you know *the* Miss Grinscoombe?” Miss Winters questioned curiously.

The extraordinary eyes kept themselves hidden behind rather densely lashed lids. “Yes, ma’am.” The voice was gentle enough to be almost a whisper.

There was a feeling in the room as of some emotion beating powerfully against a solid wall. Miss Sherman cleared her throat.

“This is quite another Miss Grinscoombe,” she

said, "though I believe she is distantly connected. She is, however, exceedingly cultured, but very poor. She is anxious to get a pupil. Lack of a diploma prevents her from getting a salaried position in — "

"But look here, I want a teacher with one of them, ma'am."

"But, Mr. Kinwydden — there, I have it now! She knows a thousand times more than any diploma-made teacher I have ever met. She is a real little lady — "

"Then she won't do." Q. T. Kinwydden brought down a marble hard fist on a marble hard palm. "I want a man. I want some one to scare me into learnin'. I want the quirt — or somethin' about equally urgin' — savvy?"

Miss Sherman pleaded. "Won't you please go and see Miss Grinscombe first? I believe she'll be able to keep you in order. Let me write her a note. And I'll tell you where she lives. It can't do any harm for you to see her. She does need the money so!"

"But," grumbled the young man, "she don't need the money near as bad as I need the learnin'. Well, ma'am, if *you* say so, I'll go and give her a look over and let her give me one. I reckon that will be enough." He rose and looked at Miss Sherman and smiled. "Ain't I big enough for the third grade?" he asked her, winningly.

"Ah!" she smiled, "I wish you were small enough. I think I'd like to teach you. Come, Grace, I must get through these papers before nine o'clock."

"Good-night to you," he said. "And thanks. I've

made you lots of trouble.” But at the door she found him close beside her. He laid a finger lightly on her arm.

“Where did you say — she lived? I mean, Miss Heloise?”

“I did n’t say.” Miss Sherman’s tone was a trifle sharper.

“The — the Manners?”

“Oh, Grinscoombe Manor. It’s five miles out of town along the river road. But — you understand — that is not the Miss Grinscoombe I was speaking of.”

“Yes, ma’am, I understand. North of the town?”

“Yes.” She went decidedly away.

Up in her room she turned and opened the big eyes of her astonishment upon her friend.

“Grace! Who and what is he?”

Grace was laughing heartily. “Oh, he has helped my backache so! Louise!”

“But why did he question me so closely about Miss Grinscoombe? It really worries me.”

“Perhaps he knows her.”

“Perhaps!” The tone was a masterpiece of school-marm irony.

“And what a name — Kinwydden!”

“It sounds Welsh.”

“And what,” cried the school-teacher in an ascending key — “and what do you suppose the ‘Q. T.’ stands for?”

“I can’t imagine. He’s a pleasant-looking man, is n’t he?”

“Pleasant!” cried the dimpled one; “he is the most extravagantly handsome young man I’ve ever seen in all my life.”

CHAPTER II

SIR SYDNEY GRINSCOOMBE SUFFERS AN INSULT

“HAND me a cigarette, won’t you, Pom?”

The young man addressed — a pale, small, curly young man with light and prominent eyes — rose obediently from a rug before a dancing fire and chose a cigarette from a silver box on a very solid mahogany table. It was an old mahogany table and the box was old silver. The light of the fire seemed to have sunk deep into the surface of the polished wood and the polished metal.

“Excuse me, Katrina,” murmured the girl who had made the request. She was drawing delicately at the little white cylinder, to which Pom applied a match. “I did n’t mean to interrupt your story. Go on. I’m horribly shocked and Pom is blushing most becomingly.”

Katrina, who sat in a large chair on the other side of the fire, was small and dark and sparkling. She was dressed above the waist in a single fold of purple tulle above which her young shoulders and arms were startlingly marooned. The young man on the floor beside her was toasting marshmallows with one hand. With the other he caressed Katrina’s silken ankle where it was hidden by a length of floating tulle. There were half a dozen other young people about the hearth. They were sprawled against cushions and propped against chairs. There was a good deal of

floating tulle about and several very pretty and well-cared-for faces. The voices were at once eager and *ennuyés*, the faces were all cool and composed, to hide the natural quick gayety and animation which nevertheless electrified the air. Only the young hostess, enthroned a trifle aloof from the group in a very soft deep chair, was truly overshadowed by the cloud of life. Her lips were sullen and her eyes heavy. But, even under the cloud, she lay there along the length of the lounging-chair like a shining crescent moon. She was very fair and very smooth, her clinging dress was of silver cloth. Her long narrow feet and ankles were dressed in silver. There was a half-moon of brilliants in her hair. She had a face of so fine and clear and chiseled a perfection that it drew probing look after look to satisfy an inevitable incredulity. The lips were pink with long proud curves, the nose was a trifle pinched, the eyes were narrow and serene, of a clear, greenish gray, the brows just penciled in golden brown; the hair, all sleek and trained and groomed, fitted close about the small head like a dark golden helmet.

Katrina went on with her story. The climax was hailed by convulsive laughter. One of the youths rolled on the floor. One of the girls leaned over to inspect her marshmallow. This was to hide the shamed crimson of her face. The young Diana in the long chair did not laugh at all. Neither did she blush. She lifted her eyelids and inspected the *raconteuse*.

"You're getting on, Katrina," she said. "Quite soon you'll graduate into Mrs. Fayre's class."

"It's fun to make the boys blush," said Katrina. "Look at Pom."

"I'm not blushing," said that youth, who indeed was as colorless as though he had been permanently faded in a strong sun. "But I tell you what — you know — Mrs. Fayre, now — ! Don't go as far as that, Katrina. She's a bit too strong."

"Of all the unblushing matrons!" said another marshmallow-toaster of an age rather more advanced than that of his companions.

Diana gave a little malicious ripple of laughter. "I've seen Mrs. Fayre blush," she said.

There rose a chorus of disbelief.

"Yes, really. It was out West last summer, when we were on that hunting trip — Tommy and Mrs. Fayre and the Doones and I. We used to sit up all hours by the camp-fire. It was splendid — but Mrs. Fayre used to spoil the beauty of the night by telling her awful stories. The guides would sit and listen with their eyes on the ground. One night, though, one of them did speak. He'd been lying with his chin in his hands. He sat up and looked straight at Mrs. Fayre. She began to giggle — you know her way — and say, 'Is n't that funny? Is n't that funny?' — and Kew just spoke up gravely and slowly, the way those Westerners speak, with a sort of drag. 'You must excuse me, lady, for not laughin' any, but I heard that story years ago in a cow-camp when I was a boy.'" Lelo Grinscombe had given a remarkable imitation of the drawl with its keen edge of irony that left a cut across the silence. Katrina moved uneasily.

"And she blushed?"

"Yes. She blushed all over her face and neck and about five minutes later she slunk off to her tent and went to bed."

"Served her damn right," said the older young man. "That's what they need — that sort."

"Was his name really Kew?" asked Katrina in a rather meek voice.

"That's what they called him." Lelo had relapsed into languor again. She blinked lazily at the smoke of her expiring cigarette.

Then Pom dropped a marshmallow into the fire and there was a flurry of rescue and reproach. In the midst of it a young and rosy manservant stepped softly into the room, came to Lelo's chair, and handed her a slip of paper.

"A — er — gentleman to see you, miss. You would be expecting him, he said. He had no card, miss, and I could n't seem to catch his name. So he wrote it down for you, miss."

Heloise Grinscoombe bent her golden helmet and her crescent of brilliants over the paper.

"Q. T. Kinwydden," she read to herself and looked up. The boredom and the sullenness had left her face, which was quite radiant with surprise, amusement, and a sort of fantastic dismay.

"Where is he, James?"

"In the South room, miss."

"Very well. I'll see him. Tell him I'll be there."

She stood up to a slim tall height.

"I'll be back in a minute," she said, smiling down

at the expectant faces. "Then I'll have something amusing to tell you. As Mrs. Fayre would say — 'Is n't it funny? Is n't it funny?'"

She moved slowly out from the circle of fire glow through the large dimness of the room and shut the door. Curiosity was left to toast its marshmallows.

Facing Q. T. Kinwydden, where he stood waiting in the South room, there hung on the wall above the fireplace a portrait of Heloise Grinscoombe's great-great and many greats-grandfather. The portrait was well copied from the original in the London National Gallery. The gentleman wore an enormous curled and powdered wig, a lace cravat, a wine-colored coat, and long ruffles over hands that rested on the golden knob of a stick. Wedge-shaped and pale between the masses of his wig, his face looked down — a handsome and unpleasant countenance. He had narrow green-gray eyes, and sneering lips. There were lines of dissipation and ill-humor about his mouth. The brush that had painted him must have been dipped into an understanding hatred. The sitter seemed to know this and to be rather ironically amused. Kinwydden's observation, being quickly done with the low-ceilinged room and its delicate old gilded and brocaded furniture, centered on this portrait. Presently he strode close and stared straight up into the contemptuous eyes.

"You d——d curly" — he used a favorite Western epithet, "I'll be derved if you ain't a *man!*" A fantastic hatred possessed him. Deliberately he lifted

his fingers and snapped them close before the long and delicate nose. "I ain't afeared of you," he said.

There was a light sound in the hall and Kinwydden faced about and straightened. He crushed his soft hat behind him in his hands. He was pale under the eternal brown of his Western sun. Except for that, no one would have guessed at the terrifying labor of his pulses. In the slight grace of his surroundings he looked especially tall and grim, stately, not unimpressive. The long gold-colored curtains parted and Heloise came quickly toward him, holding out her hand.

"Why, Kew," she said in her light cool voice; "this is the most delightful and thrilling surprise."

His hand closed like warm iron over hers. He looked at her with no change in his mask. But, for a moment, it was impossible for him to speak. He was struck breathless by her beauty. He had never seen her like this. She had looked in camp, in her riding-breeches and flannel shirt, her hair a double lump of gold on her neck, a much younger and less considerable person. She had had a franker and more simple air. Her beauty had been more native, more homely, more of the woods. There had not been this long grace of step and carriage. Now, his imagination leaped to the memory of a bright new moon shining above his camp-fire just silvering the tops of the firs.

She drew away her hand and he got back his voice and his smile, both of them badly shaken.

"It had n't ought to surprise you any — me bein' here," he said. "I meant what I told you."

Heloise sat down and he too, obeying her gesture,

drew up one of the gilded chairs. He kept his eyes bravely upon her, but there was an air about him now of a wary wild thing half-conscious of a trap.

"Do you suppose I remember everything you told me — out there in the hills! Oh, Kew" — dropping her determined and mocking lightness — "was n't it wonderful! How I wish we were there now — up in the mountains by that stream — the camp-fire — and the stars — and the horses cropping!"

"I wish we was too," he said. His throat was contracted by the bitter intensity of his wish. Out there he had been master, he had been dominant, the leader, the one who knew. It had seemed natural enough there, all that he felt. And to her it had evidently seemed not too unnatural. They were, after all, as she had told him, man and woman. Kinwydden braced himself. He must not give her one glimpse of his profound misgivings. They could not materially affect the iron of his resolve, but they might disturb his forces woefully.

"Well, ma'am," he said, and he smiled coolly enough, "I have n't forgotten anything *you* said out there. And that's the reason I have come trailin' you to Sluypenkill."

"It was sweet of you," she smiled. "You're on your way —?"

"Nowheres. I'm here. I've made camp."

She lifted her eyebrows so that the crescent of brilliants moved and glittered. "Made camp? Here?"

"Yes, ma'am. At the River Hotel. I'm agoin' to get that edication you told me was the only thing that

stood atween us — you and me — a man and a woman.”

Heloise moved slightly in her chair. She seemed, from the look of her, to be selecting her answer as carefully as though it had been an edged tool. Such tools, however, have two edges.

“Kew,” she said, “there is one thing I have not forgotten. That is, that you saved my life.”

He flushed deeply. “I don’t think I quite like you rememberin’ that — just now,” he said.

The quickness and shrewdness of his intuition startled her. She had taken it for granted that all the skill would be on her side in this game to which she had — in the idleness of a forest holiday — lightly challenged him, but to which he had bent his will with a grimness that had begun now seriously to frighten her.

“I could n’t possibly forget it, Kew — now or any other time. Besides, I’ve promised you my friendship.”

“Yes, ma’am. You did promise me your friendship. But that was quite a ways back. You have to skip some to get back to that. Still, I’m not askin’ no more from you — as yet, ma’am.”

She smiled, though her face was scarlet. “I’m glad. I should love to be your friend.”

“But you have got to keep rememberin’, Miss Grinscoombe, that I am not pledged to that trail. Somewhere, I turn off.”

“It’s good to hear you talk, Kew. It takes me back to last October. So you’re going to stay at the River

Hotel. Is n't it an impossible place? It looks so. And who's going to give you your education?" She added maliciously, "Besides me."

This brought from him a narrowed look and a flush. "Yes, ma'am. That's sure the truth. You'll be givin' me the biggest part of my edication." He smiled grimly. "I can take a whole lot of punishment from you — if it's agoin' to help any."

"I am not making any promises but one of friendship," she warned him.

"I know that, Miss Grinscoombe. But, all the same, I'll be thankful for any help. It's all slide rock and down timber to me — this edication business."

"But why should I want to help you?" she asked. It was as though she flicked him with a cruel little whip.

He fixed upon her a hard and brilliant gaze. "Because you kind of — do," he drawled at his gentlest.

She blushed again faintly. It was true, she did — want to help him — as an experiment? As a dangerous game? Or for some deeper and more human reason?

"Very well," she admitted. "I do. I want to see what you can make out of yourself. It's rather splendid of you. You have everything against you, of course."

He had turned his eyes to the portrait. "Say," he asked her suddenly, "who is that feller — with the hair?"

"Sir Sydney Grinscoombe — my great-great-great-great-grandfather."

"Don't he look it, though? Don't he fancy himself? Well, ma'am" — his eyes came back to her without explanation of their excursion — "if you'll give me some trainin', I'll sure be grateful."

She considered him; her young smile was rather mocking. "I wonder," she said, "if you'd stand for it."

He did not flinch, though the dread in his eyes was perfectly apparent to her.

"Yes, ma'am," he promised her and smiled a fine grim little smile.

"Very well. The first suggestion I would make is that you go to a good tailor and get some real clothes and have the right kind of a hair-cut."

He was scarlet, but kept his eyes up bravely. "Yes, ma'am, I'll do that. And thank you kindly."

"You see, when I was in the West, I dressed for the West. Now, you're in the East and — "

"Yes — ma'am, I savvy. I had a notion these was first-class. The man in the Chicago store told me so. It was a classy-looking store too."

"They're awful. I'll give you the name of a tailor," said Heloise gravely. "If you want to spend the money?"

"Yes, ma'am. I'm aimin' to pay for my education."

"Here endeth the first lesson," she smiled. The quotation missed him completely, as he had never seen the inside of a church. But he too smiled, and valorously.

"Well, Miss Grinscombe, did n't I take it lyin' down?"

"You did. You're a good sport. Now, Kew, listen. I've a party of friends in there waiting for me. Won't you let me call you up and arrange for a nice quiet friendly talk some time when I'm free? I want you" — her eyes gleamed mirthfully — "to meet my aunt."

He said nothing. He had risen and was looking at her fixedly.

"Oh," she said with quickness, "of course I'd love you to meet my friends. But this is — a — er — a sort of club. It would n't be any fun for you."

"I savvy. Well, good-night to you, Miss Grinscoombe."

A moment later, he was alone out in the damp chilliness of the May night. He found his way down the long straight poplar-shadowed driveway to the stone gateposts and turned resolutely down the road townwards. The lights gleamed from across the river in a double row. A train rumbled below the steep bank. Dogs were barking here and there. A motor glared upon him and hummed into darkness again. He walked fast, his head down, his hands tightened into fists, his teeth clenched.

"It's agoin' to hurt," he thought. "It's agoin' to hurt bad. But" — he flung up his chin — "by God! I'll win. A woman and a man. A woman and a man. She said so herself. You d—— curly — !" He was speaking to the gentleman with the curled wig whose face seemed to be painted in phosphorescence against his eyelids. There was a cruel resemblance to Heloise which Kinwydden refused to recognize.

Presently he relaxed, stopped to roll and light a cigarette. With the familiar comforter between his lips, he swung more lightly on his way. Now he was smiling a little.

"You're a plumb fool, Q. T.," was his conclusion. And he began to call himself quaint and quite horrifying names.

CHAPTER III

CHIVALRY

TRUE to her promise, Heloise sent her sartorial information, and Q, in search of fashion, betook himself after his chastening introduction to Sir Sydney, to New York and walked, as unsuspecting a morsel as possible, into its maw. First he was duly robbed by Heloise's recommended tailor, barber, and haberdasher; then, self-conscious and elated, secretly grinning at his own splendor, he strolled forth into the quick-stepping Fifth Avenue crowd. He walked with a cowboy's rhythmic step, and, as the man inside the clothes radiated originality, he attracted more attention than he guessed. Q liked New York. It stirred and stimulated him. Shop-windows, women, motors, towering cliffs of stone, the canyons that sent in their streams of trucks and taxi-cabs and hurrying travelers to the great rivers of traffic — every one of these aspects hurried his blood. A man who loiters and looks is a man who courts adventure. Q's temperament was naturally a lightning conductor. From the revolving glass door of a large store there stepped out a slim and tall lady in furs, a sumptuous lady, white-faced and yellow-haired if the two waved specimens above her ears were to be trusted; as she trod past Q, just glancing at him with monkey-brown eyes, he saw a smartly dressed youth slide a hand into the loop of her shopping-bag and so cleverly relieve

her of it that she did not so much as feel its absence. The youth, however, was smitten by prompt justice — a bolt from the blue. He slid several yards along the pavement, and Q, hardly breathing more rapidly, relieved him of his booty and returned it to its owner.

There was a quick assembling of an appreciative crowd, the thief was put into the hands of the law, and Q, glowing with unexpected conspicuousness, gave his odd name to the authorities, who made much of its oddity, as did the crowd, and, turning to receive his thanks from the furred lady, found that she had gone. This hurt his feelings. But it ought to have warned him past any danger of ensuing folly. What happened next was so completely his own fault that it could hardly be called a happening; emphatically New York was not to blame.

Q lunched at Delmonico's because, even in the remotest West, that restaurant, in the mind of cowboy and ranchman, still stands for all that can be imagined of metropolitan fashion and gastronomical delight. He placed himself on a chair that faced the entrance door, as though he were waiting for a lunch companion, and there he studied the rites of restaurant procedure until, feeling mastery, he rose, checked what should be checked, tipped who should be tipped, and bought himself a small table not too near the music and pleasantly near an open window. There he studied first the menu, consulting gravely with his waiter, then, less concernedly, his surroundings. At the nearest table, with her back to him, sat the sumptuous lady with furs and blonde hair. She

was lunching with a man, better dressed even than Q and less conscious of it. He seemed, in fact, to be conscious of very little in his own personality and to care not at all what impression he might be making on the world at large. He did not look like a man who probes any deeper than a mirror surface into his own consciousness. He was, however, interested, in some fashion, in the sumptuous lady. Q had no business to listen to the conversation at this table, and, having listened, he had less business to resent it. No one was complaining of his own somewhat unusual manipulation of forks and spoons nor of his filial attitude toward the waiter. Nevertheless, Q listened. He felt that Fate must have meant something by its mischievous trick of coincidence.

The man was talking. His glabrous, edgeless voice flowed over the woman and Q began to feel that it would cling to her. Q had heard plenty of vile conversation, he had heard filthy epithets such as this speaker would probably be incapable of imagining, but he had never heard a man, sane, sober, decently clad, so deliberately insult a delicately nurtured woman. She sat very still; he could only see her back, except when, by turning his head a fraction, he consulted a reflection, but this told him that she was cool-featured, slim, every detail of her perfectly chosen and arranged. Her face had reddened lips, her hair was probably doctored, but she was a gentlewoman, or what in a democratic country passes for one; a married woman, for her left hand resting on the table bore a plain band smothered in a body-guard of jewels. She

listened to the man and gave no sign of anger, only that Q saw her moisten her painted lips.

When he had seen this little betraying action more than twice, and when, under a crescendo of sarcasm, she flinched, Q found himself being unwillingly dragged out of his seat. God knows, he did n't want to make a scene, God knows he hated a row as any peaceful cowboy hates it, God knows it was all none of his business and the West hates a busybody, but God knows, too, that no man with real blood in his body could sit still and suffer a woman to be so shamefully entreated. Besides, he had already rescued her purse; was n't her pride of more importance to her?

White with discomfort, Q presented himself before the large-bodied, sleek-headed disturber of his peace.

"I'm right sorry to butt in," he said, "but I can't let a lady be spoken to thisaway in my hearing." And, as the man clattered suddenly to his feet, Q struck.

They were forcibly torn apart a few seconds later by a mob of white-lipped waiters. Q, having satisfied honor, was ready to defend his action and to explain himself — he had opened his mouth to do so when all virtue was taken out of him by the object of his chivalry. She stood, no whiter than before, her lips as red, a queer, half-amused, half-disgusted smile in her monkey-brown eyes.

"He simply for no reason in the world attacked my husband," she said quite clearly and rather loud; "I think he must be out of his mind."

Q wilted. His defense died. He was, it would seem, about to be placed under arrest. A policeman had been summoned. It was an intensely uncomfortable situation and the eyes of diverted, disgusted, and delighted lunchers glittered upon him unbearably.

Q's eyes turned from face to face, not beseechingly, but with a puzzled sort of desperation. He wanted pretty badly just then to see some of the boys. There was Shorty, for instance — Shorty would make quick work of that head waiter. He was reminded of a certain incident at the bar of Stony. That had been a tight hole, if you like. He struggled for the philosophy of past experience. Well, he'd spent more than one night in the pen for riotous skylarking. It would n't be so bad when he was once out of Delmonico's.

Seeking Shorty, or a reminder of him, he saw that a face had emerged from the crowd, a face with some sort of different and definite intention toward him. It belonged to a slim, quick-moving young man of assured bearing. He came to the head waiter and touched his arm.

"I know this gentleman" — it was the voice of a man who takes quick control of an emergency — "and I will make myself responsible for him. I saw what happened. I was sitting near both tables. It was a misunderstanding — or rather a misapprehension" — for a second his red-brown eyes gleamed coldly at the furred lady — "he thought the lady was being insulted. It was, I may say, a natural misapprehension. He won't give you any more trouble. I can answer for that."

Q, white now and breathing rather fast, looked into the man's eyes. They smiled, a shy, witty, restless sort of smile, which the lips repeated, bearing out their information. The rescuer, it would be imagined, was clever, nervous, volcanic, and repressed. He had now a fine color in a somewhat lined face which, Q thought, but for the momentary excitement would have been pale. The long fingers he had laid on Q's arm, still gripped by a panting waiter, were sensitive, nervous, skillful fingers, the whole body was finely and tightly strung with intermittent limps as though its owner relaxed and then renewed an effort. His thick and curly crop of red hair burned defiantly like a protest of boyishness against the driven and controlled quality of the man. All this was not included in Q's comment, which might briefly have been expressed in one exclamation, "Here's a man!" Suddenly he was glad, as though he had met up with Shorty on the range.

Having smiled, the stranger went on with his defense. "His name is Cartwright, friend of mine from the West. Let him off, won't you, Hartman? It's always best not to stir up anything. Honestly, he'll give you no more trouble. He's not used to New York. The lady, naturally, does n't want to prosecute. It might be awkward for her, when you think" —

"Naturally, she won't prosecute," her husband responded gruffly, for her. She was now smiling, her eyes were contemplating Q thoughtfully, appreciative of his good looks.

Two minutes later, Q found himself out of range of that terrible circle of unsympathetic eyes, out on the pavement in a sunlight that seemed to have more of humanity, more of sympathy. He straightened slowly and drew in a profound breath.

"Here's your taxi," said his companion. "Jump in, Cartwright, and" — here he lowered his voice to a violent whisper — "go to wherever you belong and, for God's sake, don't try rescuing ladies. You're a d—— fool, are n't you?"

"I sure feel like one," admitted Q reluctantly.

"Ladies don't need rescue, they don't want it, they don't like it. If they let themselves be manhandled by tongue or fist, you can jolly well believe that it's for some good purpose of their own. Have you got that?"

Q said, "Yes, sir," smiled, and fixed his amazing eyes upon his admonisher. He was conscious of a warm desire for confidence. The man was certainly no older than he, but there was a fine sharp finish to him that Q recognized as the work of a far more chiseling experience, something that the rough, weather-furrowed granite of his own personality would never acquire. He wanted, with a certain bitterness, to justify himself, to explain something of his dilemma. The taxi began to whir away the minutes. His friend was probably impatient to return to an interrupted meal.

"There's gels," said Q defensively, "that needs night-herdin' till they're eighty. Look at Grandma Sam — her carryin's on. My snakes! Some day I'll

hev to tell you about that. And Ma Shippen's daughter, kind of a storm center she was; there's a biscuit-shooter where I'm stayin' now that reminds me of her — Loretta Shippen. Had n't it been for me ropin' her up and standin' over her with a gun until her ma come back, she'd have went off with Dismal — and she was a good gel too! Gels is desprit kind of critters, right along until they die. Likely, that lady in there, if she'd 'a' been rescued, soon enough, would have gentled real nice. I reckon it's come too late. When they once get to be strays — that's sure the truth — you can't do nothin' with them. And that's where I made my mistake. I won't keep you, stranger.”

It was not until the taxi-cab was halfway to the station that Q realized miserably that he had never thanked his friend, had not even learned his name. He had said — with reluctance, glancing back at a hovering clerk, “Good-bye, Cartwright. I'll see you later. I want to hear about Grandma Sam.” And, waving a hand, had gone back smiling into the restaurant, his fiery head extinguished like a torch. Q felt diminished and abashed, as much by his neglect of a golden opportunity as by his misplaced chivalry. He had failed in gratitude and he had failed to put his brand on this new friend. And, he admitted, he was very homesick for Shorty on this new range.

CHAPTER IV

THE BEGINNING OF AN EDUCATION

To Mary Grinscombe that prospect of a pupil meant so desperately much that all day, after she had received Miss Sherman's note, her face was flushed and her heart thumped at any ringing of the door-bell. After three days, her face lost its flush and her pulses went back into their patient harness; so that when she answered a certain ringing on a certain Tuesday afternoon, it was with perfect nonchalance. She looked up calmly into a grave brown face, and then, under the brilliant eyes that saw through her, she did regain the flush.

"You are Mr. Kinwydden?"

"Yes, ma'am. Miss Sherman sent me."

The tiny narrow hall seemed to shrink and fade about the tall bright-eyed visitor. He followed Mary into the sitting-room. It was a working-man's little house on a shabby side street of the town, and it was a particularly shabby house. It needed paint and it needed repairs. The tiny square parlor, however, was not the parlor of a working-man, it was the book-room of a scholar. Its walls were lined with books and its big central table was loaded with them. On the narrow mantel over a shallow fireplace stood two great globes, celestial and terrestrial, and between them ticked modestly a tiny clock. There was very little else in the room except the chairs, flowers, and two pairs of very fresh white curtains.

Mary sat down near one of the windows and Kinwydden placed himself before her.

“I’d have come before,” he said, “but I’ve been to New York to buy me some clothes.” His tweed suit was perfection, and his silk shirt and his tie. His haircut was also perfection. The immaculate get-up and the natural grace of his manner and bearing rather accentuated the imperfections of his speech.

“I am taking after an edication,” he smiled, “and they tell me you know more than a schoolmarm.”

She laughed. “I have n’t been able to get a position as schoolmarm, though I’ve tried. But tell me what you want to study, Mr. Kinwydden.”

Q went gravely down the list, his unfaltering eyes fixed on her.

“Readin’ and writin’ and arithmetic. Geography, History, Poetry, and Literachoor. Languages alive and dead.” And this time he added, with a dazzling and disarming smile, “And I don’t *keer* if you throw in the py-anna.”

Mary drew in her breath and leaned back. “How much do you know now?” she asked.

“Nothin’.”

“Nothing at all?”

“No, ma’am. I’m the gol-derndest ignorantest growed man in the U-nited States.”

“But you can read and write — a little? You’ve been to school?”

“I’ve never seed the inside of a school, ma’am. I’ve learned myself to write my name and I’ve learned myself to read signs and such-like. Oh, I can

make out to gather the sense of a letter. And I can figger a bill of sale and weights and measures — weighin' cattle and such — ”

“You are a cattle-man?”

“I was raised in a cow-camp,” he said, “and ’t was in a cow-camp I got my edication.”

“And your parents never tried to send you to school?”

“I never knowed my parents, ma’am. The folks I was left with licked me so I run away when I was about a five-year-old. And I turned up in a cow-camp where they kep’ me till I was pretty near growed. I worked for that outfit. I have n’t had no time to get round to learnin’, ma’am, but now I have the time and some money and I’m plumb set on learnin’. I’ll be a right willin’ scholard, ma’am, if you choose to take me on.”

“I’d love to,” said Mary.

“Of course, I had ought to have a man. Or some big fierce woman who would scare me.”

“I think I’ll be able to scare you enough, perhaps,” said Mary.

He studied her. She had the brightness of a shaded light, the quickness of water shadowed by an old bridge. There were ripples that had never been blown upon by the winds of happiness and freedom. In a small dark face, her mouth was as sensitive as a brave neglected child’s. Her eyes were Irish eyes, waggish and wistful, of a sweet bluish gray. Her hair was dark and curly with threads of fire. She had the Grinscoombe chin and her mother’s black

straight eyebrows close above the eyes. When she looked up, her eyelashes curled almost to touch these brows. It gave her an arch expression, a very innocent, serious sort of archness. She was twenty-four years old, but looked, at moments, for all the smothered and shadowed quality, younger. Sometimes she might have been ten years older. Kinwydden decided that she was twenty-eight or twenty-nine. He had conceived at once a huge respect for her. She had a great deal of kindness, and of dignity. All this could be read in her eyes and lips and smile, the carriage of her small slight body and its movements, both impulsive and restrained.

"Do you think you can manage me?" he asked.

"I think so. If you want so much to learn — that's half the battle."

"Oh," he said, "I want to." He sighed, so oppressive was his desire.

"How much time can you give?"

"All the time you can give *me*."

"Every morning — all morning long?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"And you will prepare lessons for me?"

"Whatever you say, ma'am, goes."

"My charge — " Mary began, faltering.

"You're agoin' to work hard," said Kinwydden grimly. "Make it a sizable figure."

Driven by her necessity she named a sum that seemed to her exorbitant.

"Why," he drawled, "that ain't a laborin' man's pay. You leave it to me, lady. I know better'n you

what sort of trail you're hittin'. Make it twict that and the lessons'll come cheap."

"Thank you," she said. "You must try me first. When shall we begin?"

Her face was radiant, though she tried to be sober, and her voice sang.

"Right now, ma'am."

It made her feel a trifle breathless, but she got him placed with the table between herself and him and she cleared a space and got out pencils and paper.

"To-day we'll find out just how much you do know," she said. "And then I'll lay out a course for you. First, write your name down there for me, please."

He went through the laborious performance and handed her the result.

"'Q. T. Kinwydden.' What does the 'Q. T.' stand for?" she asked with all her kindness. The scrawled signature, the strong brown hand, the face, the eyes, spoke aloud to her heart for its kindness.

"Stand for?" he repeated.

"Yes. The 'Q' means what?"

"Why, ma'am, you've got me millin' 'round. Q. T. is what it stands fer."

"Q. T.?"

"Q. T. *Kew Tee*."

"Not — Mr. Kinwydden — not 'Cutie'?" Her face was scarlet.

"Yes, ma'am." He smiled. "It does sound kind of funny. But I'm broke to it. That's what they called me in the cow-camp when I was a kid. I was one of

these big-boned akkard kids. I could n't rightly control my hands and feet. I was always fallin' into things and over things. That's why they named me thataway. 'Say, there goes Cutie into the fryin'-pan,' they'd say. Or, 'Look at Cutie, puttin' his foot into my coffee-cup.' Later, they got to callin' me 'Cute' for short, and because I was cute with the hosses — kind of wise with brons. And then it came to be 'Quiet' because I'd a way of sayin' that word to the hosses or when there was a row on — 'Quiet! Quiet!' — thataway. And when I got to signin' my name and drawin' my pay, well, ma'am, I did n't know no other name but 'Cutie,' and I knowed my letters and I figured out that was the way to spell it. 'Q. T.' Ain't it right, ma'am? None of the boys ever said nothin' ag'in' it."

Mary had dropped her wistful and waggish eyes. Her sympathy was too quick, too sensitive, too easily emotional. She knew it.

"That's not just the right way to spell 'Cutie,' Mr. Kinwydden," she said. "But 'Quiet' begins with a 'Q.' I think," she told him, "you deserve a better name."

"They call me Q all over the range out there," he said, "and I ain't got no call to change it."

"Very well," she said, for his tone was proud. "And the Kinwydden — that sounds Welsh."

"It is. It was a Welshman that wished it on me. He left it to me when he died. I come down from the hills to his ranch onct. He was an awful free-hearted old fellow. And I was took awful sick. Some kind of

fever. Had n't it been for him, I'd have sure died. But he nursed me well. Every year I'd travel down to visit him. When he died he left me his little old ranch and he asked me to keep his name for him. 'Q' he said to me, 'I ain't never had no boy nor no folks. And you ain't never had no father nor no folks. I want you to kerry my name for me. That'd make me die easy in my mind.' So I did." He was silent. She saw the feeling hidden by his mask. Then it broke before his smile. "It's sure a hard name, though, ain't it, ma'am? Times I've had to plump spur myself into keepin' it. And it don't go right with Q, does it?"

"I don't know, I think I rather like it. Q. T. Kinwydden — it's not a bit like other names."

And that was the difficulty, the great one, in the way of Q. T.'s education. He, as well as his name, was too unusual, too interesting: to Mary's narrow and smothered experience, altogether too thrilling. It was easier to talk about what he did know than what he did n't. Mary had a feeling that he knew so much.

Toward the end of this first lesson there drifted into the room, rather as if a draft had blown him there, a little oldish gentleman with a mass of books under his arm. This gentleman was introduced by Mary as "Papa." Her voice was tender, just touched by the softness of a brogue, on the "papa." He made no difficulty of the pupil's name. In fact, to those odd syllables as to every syllable he spoke, he gave a jewel-like cutting, quite beautifully new to Western ears. Q. T. found himself fascinated by Mary's father. He was such a fine little gentleman, greatly

damaged by some crumpling and discoloring process of one of life's acid solutions in which he had very apparently been dipped. He had a sharp, long, pointed nose, reddened at the end; he had lips clever, sensitive, hurt, with quiet little humor pockets at their drooping corners; he had beautiful visionary eyes — rimmed with red and continually watering; his white thick hair sprang back like a crest triumphant over his downfall. It was by way of being his *panache*. And his fine little old body was shaken and rickety and rackety, but wore its shabby clothes quite beautifully — with an air.

“Say,” Q. T. remarked after the small gentleman had excused himself, tenderly to Mary, whimsically to Kinwydden, and had left the room. “Your Pa he sure favors that curly feller at Grinscoombe Manners” — it was a long time before Q. T. got his mind straight on the matter of the “Grinscoombe Manners” — “only with the meanness took out of him.”

At which pronouncement, Mary laughed quite immoderately, as people laugh when suppressed bitterness is suddenly released by mirth.

CHAPTER V

A CROSSING OF SWORDS

MISS SELDA GRINSCOOMBE, *the* Miss Grinscoombe, lifted the lid of a silver kettle and looked to see if the water were about to boil. It was, but she dropped in a square of sugar to hasten the process. Then she straightened a delicate tea-cup, and turned her eyes toward her visitor. To all these trifling actions she gave an air of cold importance. She was sitting opposite Q. T. Kinwydden on the glass-enclosed veranda at Grinscoombe Manor. Her chair had a very high and wide back of wicker — a chair like a bird of the peacock variety that had turned up a fan-shaped tail behind Miss Grinscoombe's head. This background accentuated the stiffness and haughtiness of her carriage, the small head, its gray-black hair carefully arranged, the long neck banded with velvet to hide the little wrinkles under the chin. Her beauty of color and texture had gone, but it had left a hard handsomeness of bone. The disguises of youth had gone too. It was impossible longer to conceal harshness of temper, a tyrannical will, and a passionate sort of selfishness. Miss Grinscoombe's head would have been especially decorative on the end of a revolutionary pike. It looked rather as if it belonged there. But in all the hardness and harshness of its lines and its expression, there was a curious underlying weakness. The great, almost staring gray eyes

had a guarded look that seemed to brazen out a little waver of timidity; the thin lips, fallen in a trifle between chin and nose, set themselves, it might be imagined, with a certain concealing effort; the hands moved calmly and stiffly, but with a deliberate stiffness. One could not fancy Miss Selda tremulous, but one could fancy that she had a secret fear of tremulousness. She was a woman of sixty-five, but looked not more than fifty. It was as though at a certain age she had dried past any further possibility of deterioration. For all her tasteful, stylish, and becoming dress, there was something mummified about her.

She rested her long, distinguished hands on the arms of her chair and her stone-colored eyes in the narrow, stone-colored face made no secret of their contemptuous liking. For she liked her visitor, liked him the better because in his case there was no possible necessity for concealing an abnormal sense of superiority and a quite abnormal egotism. He was there as her niece's protégé entirely on her sufferance and she desired him to feel this with completeness. The only drawback to the situation was that so far he did not seem to feel it. He sat there and sipped his tea and murmured his polite "Yes, ma'am," and "No, ma'am," and his eyes rested upon her with a brilliant sort of tranquillity. The perfection of his clothes made him startling; his vivid coloring, the straight column of his neck hitherto unbent by the yoke of civilized collar and coat, the great hard strength of his body, were startling, but, above all, his eyes. When she met these eyes, Miss Selda had a sensation of being shocked.

If she could have looked into the brain behind the eyes, she would have been even profoundly shocked, for here in these eyes she was being really seen for the first time. When her world looked at Miss Selda, it saw *the* Miss Grinscoombe, heiress of the Grinscoombe Mills and the Grinscoombe fortune. The family had grown to its pride in England many centuries before Q's birth, and, transplanted to a new soil, it had struck deep root and had exceedingly flourished. In Old New York not yet entirely submerged and, of course, greatly more so in Sluypenkill, which had grown up in the shadow of Grinscoombe Manor, Miss Grinscoombe stood for an idea so deeply rooted and many-branched that it caused a powerful obscuration on the mind of the observer. There is this advantage in having known a few men and women in a very raw intimacy, one knows the bones of all men and women. Prejudice sits like a distorting lens across the nose of Mr. Worldly Wiseman. He sees this button and that stripe, this arrangement of feature and that decoration, but the bones of humanity are for the most part non-existent for him. Q. T. sat and sipped his tea and his eyes contemplated as through serene miles of clarity Miss Selda Grinscoombe's bones. And they were the first eyes to take cognizance of that secret waver that was hers.

Besides the sensation of shock, Miss Selda had a further sensation of release. She found herself rather more loquacious than was her habit. She was free to indulge without caution, as she frequently rather carefully indulged, a delicate impulse to cruelty. This

young man who did not belong to her world, who could never belong to it, and yet for whom with a very definite purpose she had negligently let down the bars that kept such young men in their Heaven-ordained place, was fair game for her experiments. Slaves that buried treasure and were effectually silenced by death must have been as welcome an audience to the unbending humors of their tyrant. Q was to be allowed acquaintance with the treasure of Grinscoombe and the end of his experience was to be the death of his hope and his ambition — this Miss Selda knew. She considered it a wholesome lesson for the man. She found him, in the meantime, therefore, amusing and likable company. She hoped to see a great deal of him. She told him so.

"I think," she said, "we shall enjoy our conversations, Mr. Kinwydden." She spoke delicately and carefully as though she were picking her way along a dirty path — on stones of impeccable purity. "And I think you will enjoy meeting my niece's friends. You did enjoy them, this afternoon — ?"

When Q had arrived, there had been half a dozen of Lelo's friends and he had met them and listened to them and watched them, he had answered patiently their questions and had been somewhat startled by their intense amusement over his own rare comments.

"Yes, ma'am," he said, and added with a queer ironic flash, "not one half so much as they're agoin' to enjoy me."

"Really?" Miss Selda indulged herself in the smile of Sir Sydney Grinscoombe.

"Yes, ma'am. I'm sure agoin' to get paid for all the times I've laughed to myself over the plumb foolish ways of Eastern folks with hosses and in camp and on the trail, got behind sagebrush and willow clumps and laughed myself loco. Now it's their turn."

"And you'll find, my poor boy, that they won't get behind anything to do their laughing. This generation is not sensitive for itself or for its victims."

When she called him a "poor boy," Q blinked and inwardly he was seized by an intense desire to laugh. This old lady was pitying him! Pitying him — Q! Aloud he said inexpressively, "Ain't that the truth now!" and his face was a gentle mask.

"The average New York débutante," pursued inflexibly the "old lady" who had been unwise enough to pity Q, "is a little vulgarian. Lelo is not. That is the difference, which *you*, no doubt, are experienced enough to observe. I have given her a cosmopolitan education. She has been presented in more than one European court" (through the mind of the listener flashed a picture of some unimaginably stately ceremony not unlike a heathen sacrifice). "She is fitted to be the companion of statesmen, men of the great world. She has tasted such companionship. I am so glad" — here Miss Selda extended her palm, her gesture of friendliness, in a light upward movement — "I am so glad, my dear Mr. Q" — her eyes gleamed at the queerness of her name for him — "that you have arrived at just this juncture. Lelo is bored. And when one of us is bored — !" She lifted eyes and

hands to let them fall. “The variety of mischief and danger the Grinscoombe impatience of boredom can drive them to!”

“She ain’t afraid of any danger there might be in her lookin’ in my direction,” was the cowboy’s shrewd inner comment; aloud he said, “Is that so?” in a tone of profound commiseration for the Grinscoombe fashion of escaping boredom.

Miss Selda looked at him, suddenly aware that she had been vastly more communicative than her visitor.

“What *do* you and Lelo find to talk about?” she said.

Q set down his empty cup and rose. He was aware of a great weariness, a great desire for solitude. “I reckon you’d say we talk about one of the best ways of not gettin’ bored, ma’am,” he said; and added, meeting her gray stare with a steely intentness, “I’ll be goin’ now and thank you kindly.”

Their eyes remained for an instant fixed — it was like the crossing of blades — and just for that instant there was a curious resemblance between Miss Grinscoombe and her guest.

The interview left Q smarting, restless, and excited. That night he could not sleep. He sat at his window, listening to the grinding intermittent passage of the trolley cars, the occasional hum of a motor, the laughter of town lovers and the clapping of feet. The coarse lace curtain sucked in and out behind his head. Hour by hour he sat there, immobile as a savage, except, at almost rhythmic intervals, for the rolling and lighting of a cigarette. In the corner saloon a Victor

sang and laughed and screamed dance music like a lunatic until, soon after midnight, a hand was clapped across its mouth. Gradually the town yielded its hoarse small clamors to the silence of night. There were some roistering farewells in front of the saloon, unsteady footsteps. Q thought that under his window a girl's voice spoke with surprising gentleness, just one word softly. A little tender touch of brogue reminded him of his small schoolmarm. He had a strong impulse of gratitude toward Mary Grinscoombe — who, of the three Grinscoombes he had met, had been the only one to look at him, woman to man — an impulse that turned into a longing for her help. It was almost the first time in his hard and lonely life that such an impulse had been born in him. Miss Selda's face had become a Sphinx in his path. What was there in her mind against him? "She likes me," he thought, "but she chooses to make me *winch*." "She likes me, but she means me to savvy somethin' — somethin' that'll leave me with a scar. God! I'll hev to fight her." His fist on the window-sill tightened until his arm was iron to the shoulder. "Fight her and fight the notion that's in her mind and that's in her gel's mind too. I wisht I savvied what it was — "

He tortured his brains for a name, for a vision of that mysterious inimical idea. The unaccustomed effort of such thought brought sweat to his forehead. He had the feeling of exhaustion that the hunter experiences when, at the top of a desperate slope, he stands gasping and drained of life to see the game

dropping beyond sight and range over the next high-headed hill. Q stood up from the tense position he had held. He felt cramped and stifled, bitterly homesick for the night wind of the range upon his face. He was urgent for air and space and stars. He found his way down through the sleeping hotel past the nodding night clerk at the desk and out into the silent street. A thunder-cloud pulsing with faint lightning was swallowing dim star by star above the silent town. Q strode out in the direction farthest from Grinscoombe Manor. He walked with a tireless panther step until the houses were far behind him and the scent of lawless spring rose up from the docile walled-in fields. Thunder growled like a dog at his heels. There lay a mist of cherry blossoms across the lane. It was getting densely dark. Down below in an abrupt gully, there flashed up at him the lights of a tiny hamlet beside a rattling creek. He chose a steep and sudden path, white as paint to his forest eyes, but before he reached the bottom of the gully the storm struck him, a May storm as mad as a Bacchante. It lashed and beat him. He found shelter beneath some groaning firs by a gate, which shrilled to and fro on a damaged hinge. A few paces inside it a ramshackle house danced in and out under the lightning, clinging crazily to the steep side of the hill. A light burned in one weeping and unshuttered window. As he watched this blurred light, wondering if it might not be more sensible to ask for shelter, the door opened from inside, was shut with difficulty, and some small, fluttering object scuttered down the path and, before

he could distinguish what it was, blundered against his legs. It gave forth a shrill, frightened cry, and Q exclaimed, "Great snakes! A kid! What are you doin' out in this storm this time of night?"

The little girl's pale, pointed face glistened up at him. Her little hand was at her throat. "Oh, mister, how you scared me!" she wailed.

"What did they send you out for?"

The child's urgency overcame her fluttered nerves. She panted, "I gotta get over to Sampson's house on the hill to telephone for doctor. Kin you hold the gate for me, please?"

"What doc? Who's sick?"

"My ma's took awful bad with her heart." The little creature sobbed uncontrollably. "I think she's agoin' to die this time. And Pa, he's away on a drunk and I gotta send for Dr. Sales."

"Sales, is it? Where at?"

"Up to Sluypenkill."

"Your ma's name? Stringer? You cut back into the house, gel. I'll get the doc. You say the telephone's at Sampson's up the hill — a white house — white gateposts?"

"Yes, mister."

"Get back. You're wet through already."

She seemed to be blown back into the house, and Q bent his supple strength against the storm and fought through the streaming darkness, finding the entrance presently, flanked by stiff pale ghosts. He thundered presently at the door of the frame house. It seemed a long time before his thunder brought an

opener. Bolts were deliberately withdrawn, a tall, scrawny, bearded figure in a flannel nightshirt, showing flat feet and hairy legs, held up a kerosene lamp and peered at Q.

"You Sampson?"

The man reluctantly admitted it and clawed at his red beard with the fingers of suspicion. Q patiently explained himself. Never before had he encountered so unwilling an intelligence. It was a matter for immense consideration to Mr. Sampson whether or no his telephone could be endangered by so informal and unexpected a service. At last Q found himself admitted.

"Will you look up Sales's number for me?" he asked, flushing, "while I get the rain out of my eyes."

Sampson's suspicions returned in force, but, one red-fringed eye on Q, he sought the number, found it, and pronounced it, nasally. After interminable repetitions of "Hullo," a voice other than Central's replied. It was a soft and heavy voice; it had evidently been summoned from a soft and slumbrous body. It was irritable.

"Hullo! Hullo! Yes, this is Dr. Sales. Who is it? What do you want?"

"Say, doc, there's a woman named Stringer that's took bad with her heart. I want you to come quick."

"Who is this, please?"

"It would n't do you no good to know, doc. I'm a stranger in these parts. But the woman is sure awful sick."

"Mrs. Stringer, you say? At the Gully? You'd get

me out of my bed at this hour on a night like this for a Gully case?"

"Say, doc, you better come." Q's voice had a stern sort of incredulity. "I guess you did n't hear me right. She's likely to die."

"The quicker that rabbit-warren gets thinned out, the better," said the heavy voice; "it's a regular breeding-place for disease." And the receiver clicked.

Q turned a white, bewildered face to Sampson.

"He's not agoin' to come."

Sampson made a wry grimace. "Dr. Sales don't trouble himself much over the Gully cases. No profit, lots of work, and he hates work."

"Have you any woman that'll come back with me to Mrs. Stringer and help?"

"Nope." The fingers were scratching again at the beard. "I'm alone to-night."

"Then come yourself. We've got to do what we can."

"I've got the rheumatiz and it's raining pitchforks. I'll try to get down later."

Q turned and flung himself out of the house. He had the gift of prompt and instinctive hatred, a gift of which civilization has robbed the bewildered and defrauded mind of humanity. His hatred for Dr. Sales had the relentless patience of a loping wolf.

He found at Mrs. Stringer's the interior he had expected. The smell of poverty, the same the world over, familiarly assailed his nostrils. There was a bare, chilly room, lighted by a single lamp. A little, half-dressed boy sat up among dingy blankets on

the floor and cried dismally, the older child, who had run against him, stood pinched with fear by the side of the bed, where a dark-haired young woman lay and looked up at him with pain-shadowed eyes and blue, convulsed lips.

“Would n’t he come?” she whispered, and, as he shook his head, she nearly smiled. “I thought not! O my God — this pain!”

“Ain’t there no other doc? Is there a drug-store handy?”

“There ain’t nothin’ at the Gully. If I don’t git help quick, it’ll be no good.”

Q peeled off his coat. “Well, ma’am,” he said, “I’ve lived in places where docs and drugs was scarcer than they are here and where every man’s got to be a sort of doc, himself. I’ve got some whiskey with me; we kin light a fire. Say, we’re agoin’ to pull you through.”

He brought into the room courage and hope — and courage and hope carried them all through the night and up to the gates of death, and triumphantly through them, for at dawn the woman died, silently, patiently, hopefully, her pathetic head dropping back against his shoulder. Q laid her down and smoothed her covers. He stood looking at her face, already rested from life. He was not unfamiliar with such spectacles. The children were asleep, curled up like two thin little kittens in a corner of the room. He sat down to wait for the return of that “Pa” who had “gone off on a drunk.” A desolate home-coming it would be in the still, rain-washed dawn.

When the gate clicked, Q rose and let himself quietly out on the small porch. A young, stoop-shouldered, unshaven working-man with a dull and beaten look, came slowly toward him, wavered to a stop and looked up with already stricken eyes into his face.

"Your wife was took very ill during the night," said Q gently. The man was sober enough, though he had been drinking; fumes of bad whiskey rose from him through parted, working lips. "I happened to come into your place during the storm and your little gel come runnin' out for the doctor. Doc would n't come — the storm was too bad — so I done what I could." He stepped down and put his arm heavily across Stringer's shoulders. "It was n't no use, man. She's dead."

At the sight of her, the widower, until then quite still and dull, broke out into sobbing curses.

"He's a murderer, that Sales, and I'll get him, before God I will — him and his damned horspital where they let a man die of blood-poisoning! — Too bad a storm! — Wait till I get back to the Mills! — Oh, Hallie girl, I'll pay him out for this!"

Q laid his hand a minute on the man and looked into his eyes, his own gathering gray light.

"Leave him to me, stranger," he said softly and grimly. "You leave him to me. He's mine."

CHAPTER VI

CONCERNING LOVES AND HATREDS

THE morning after the storm, Mary's pupil was late for the first time. It was half-past eleven before she opened the door in reply to the shattering peal that was his usual announcement.

"Now I am going to scold you!" she said, and there was really a fine crease of annoyance between her brows. She was completely absorbed in the education of the "gol-derndest ignorantest growed white man in the U-nited States," and she begrudged those wasted ninety minutes.

"I'm plumb ashamed of myself," said Q, and it was the only excuse he gave.

"You have so very much to learn," sighed Mary as they took their places on either side of the table, "and so short a time to learn it in. You need every second you can give to study. Now you have lost nearly two hours!"

"You had ought to lick me, lady."

For the first time his schoolmarm failed to return Q's smile, and this alarmed and distressed the Westerner more than anything she could have said. He gave her a quick, scared look and fell to work with overpowering seriousness.

In the middle of his reading-lesson, however (he was engaged on page 18 of a primer and was spelling out

“Run, girls and boys.
Jump, boys and girls.
Run to the tree, boys.
Run to me, girls” —

quite as if he meant every word of it, especially the last sentence, which he delivered with an indescribably laughable drawl), he interrupted himself to say,

“After I run away from the folks that treated me so bad, I was n’t never licked but once.”

Mary, minded to reprove him, looked up to see a white face and eyes that blazed quite through her.

Instantly she forgot everything except the spectacle. “When was that?” she asked in a very low voice, holding herself as still as though she were afraid of him.

“I was a boy of twelve or thereabouts. A big rich feller come to the cow-camp. He was half boss of the hull outfit. We boys was ridin’ the range on his pay, but he did n’t often come nigh the camps. This time he happened in on his way to one of the main ranches and he brung his boy. He was an awful plump kid, dressed up stylish in store clothes. Well, sir, he wore a kind of a strip-ed shirt with a stiff collar and he had on a straw hat. A straw hat with a blue-and-white strip-ed ribbon all about it. Yes, ma’am, it sure had that kind of ribbon. Fer-di-nand was his name. It was my job to entertain him. I was real po-lite to him, ma’am. I sure was, till he called me a name. It was a right nasty name, and I lighted into him. He was bigger ’n me and not so soft as you’d think to look at him. He was about two years older. But I was

lickin' him all right when he begun to holler, 'Popper! Popper!' like as if I'd b'en wattlin' him. Well, sir, Popper he came through the willows like a cow moose, and he tuk me by what I called my collar and havin' his ridin'-switch handy, he gave me the gol-derndest lickin' you ever need to think about. There were n't any Popper 'round fer me to holler to, so I held my tongue. All the while the Fer-di-nand kid stood by kind of pipin', 'That's right, Popper, you better give it to him. You teach him not to be so free with his fists.'"

Q's eyes came slowly back to the vision of Mary's face. "Some day," he said, "I'm agoin' to find that young feller and pay him back on that lickin' and some to spare."

There was a hard brown fist lying on the primer and Mary impulsively put her hand over it.

"Don't be revengeful, Mr. Q," she said softly; "you're too big a man to remember a thing like that."

He started under her touch, looked down at the hand and then at her again. Mary took the hand away.

"I pay off what's owed," said Q grimly, "if that's bein' revengeful. I never have spoken about that lickin' before to any one. But I ain't never forgot it. It kept me layin' awake all that night. I don't hate many folks. But I sure hate that Fer-di-nand kid. And I'm sure goin' to pass on that lickin'."

"But — you would n't know him if you saw him. You were boys. Do you know his last name?"

"Fadden," said Q. "He was brung up in the East and he lives hereabouts. Fer-di-nand Fadden."

And, for an instant, Mary opened her blue-gray eyes to a large and startled width.

"Hatin' is queer," Q went on slowly; and added with apparent irrelevance, "I've knowed some almighty fine docs, though."

Mary stared, then remembered abruptly that she was a schoolmarm.

"I shall have to invent some sort of punishment for you," she said. "You've been talking for ten minutes."

"You had n't ought to listen to me, ma'am."

She colored at his tone. "After this, I won't. And I've thought of a punishment. You must tell me all over again what you've just told me and you must put it into perfect English."

"O, Gawd Almighty!" ejaculated Q, and spent another five minutes in abject apology for his oath. But he had to tell his story again, painfully and perfectly. And even the last sentence was remembered and "served up cold," as Q expressed it.

"I have known," he had to say, "some very fine doctors," and burst out laughing for the first time in Mary's experience of him.

He left her, as usual, flushed and pleasantly excited, feeling that the shadow had been lifted from her day. She hung for a long time over the page of his writing-lesson, a proverb, written down neatly in her own straight letters at the top of the page and painfully repeated in his big hand. Her face as it read

down the lines was more like the face of a youthful mother than that of a schoolmarm. When she looked up at the sound of the tiny clock striking modestly between the globes, the shadow fell again.

And yet, those days of Mary's over which the shadow lay were tranquil and serene enough. In the morning she would prepare the breakfast, a coffee-toast-and-marmalade meal, and then she would go over the tiny house and make it shine — this before the appearance of her pupil. After lessons, there was lunch to be cooked, which she brought on a tray to her father's elbow, where he wrote at a desk in a dim corner of the Grinscoombe Free Library half a block away. In the afternoon, he came home and slept very quietly and neatly in a chair. He worked a very little with a gentle air of detachment in the vegetable garden. The working-man's house had a working-man's back yard. And then, Mary would call him in to supper with that tender and anxious softening of her voice which amounted almost to a brogue. So far, certainly, the day would have been serene; Mary would have mended and read and walked and prepared Q's lesson for to-morrow. At supper the little father would be quietly gay and Mary almost feverishly so. She would entertain her father, her father would entertain her; it was a dialogue well worth the listening to, and not in the least like the usual family mumble or clatter, rather pathetically unlike it. Even after the meal, while she was washing up the dishes, Mary would keep up her talk — until it would suddenly falter into silence. In the midst of

her story or his sophism, the little father would have tiptoed away, slunk out of his house, and down the street like a quivering piece of twilight.

Then Mary, looking thirty years instead of twenty-four, would move about the little lonely house, or try to read or sit with her head in her hands until a late, late hour, when she would stand up and, holding her head high, would walk quickly down the side street and along the main one. Her fingers would be cold and her throat tight, but if, by an unlucky chance, there were an acquaintance to be met, Mary would smile and wave her hand pleasantly as though she were going for a stroll. So — to a certain brightly lighted corner where from a swinging door stumbled and wavered a helpless little figure, to whom Mary went straight and took its arm and guided its zigzag course toward home. Her cheeks burned and her eyes smarted, but she had still the air of taking a pleasant stroll with her “Papa” — this for the benefit of that possible belated acquaintance who, if met with, greeted Mary with lowered eyes and passed her quickly by. The pity of the averted looks smote her pride like a blow.

It was one night, not very long after that lesson in which Mary had inflicted punishment, when Q. T. Kinwydden, swinging with his lithe-hipped stride along Main Street, bore down upon the pair. His eyes, trained to observation and wise in such humanities, read the tragedy and its heroism at a glance and he too smiled and passed by. But in an instant he was back again. He lifted his hat and took Mr. Grinscoombe’s arm.

"No use you lookin' at me, ma'am," he said, very low, very grim, very gentle, "I'm agoin' to see you through this."

He saw them to the porch of the little house and up the steps and, because Mary here bade him a tremulous good-night, he did not see them any farther. But he sat on the top step of the porch that needed painting so badly and, with the ears of a forest beast, he heard the dreadful stumbling up the stairs and Mary's coaxing voice as she got her charge into bed and, afterwards, her lagging step down the stairs. At the foot she seemed to pause and soon there came the pitiful low sound of her sobbing.

For five minutes Q sat and swore to himself with eloquence; when he was not able to think of a fresh oath, he stood up, opened the door, and, seeing through the dimness, he took himself straight to Mary huddled on the lowest step with her head down on her knees. There was no room for him to sit beside her on the narrow step, so he squatted on his heels as cowboys squat on their high-heeled boots about a round-up fire and put his hand over hers that were cold and wet with tears.

"You've got to let me in on this, ma'am," he said; "you've got to let me in."

In the overwhelming darkness within and without, his voice seemed to break down something in Mary's heart. For the first time in her life, she let in upon her trouble the warmth of human sympathy. She sobbed her story to Q and her fingers clung to the kind warm iron of his hand.

“He is such a darling,” she began, “and he is such a fine man altogether. I love him so. You would n’t guess, Q dear — ” she had always called him Mr. Kinwydden before — “what a heart he has, nor what a head for wit and learning and wisdom. He has genius. It’s the way those brutes have treated him! The cowards! The devils! Oh, all because he was so much finer and braver than any of them could possibly understand. When he was a very young man, not much more than a boy and living up there at the house you visit, Q, — Grinscoombe Manor, a son of old Mr. Grinscoombe, an own brother of that Miss Selda Grinscoombe, — indeed, yes, Q, he is! — he was just a sensitive, warm-hearted boy and he lost his heart and his head over a pretty little Irish maid-servant. I really think she was the first creature that ever showed a human interest and understanding toward him. She was very young herself then and — and rash and generous. Q — when he found the wrong his passion had done her — ” Mary faltered. “Do you understand?”

“I savvy, ma’am; ’t was because of some such wrong-doin’s somewhere that my mother left me with the folks that treated me so bad — and that I grewed up without a name.”

“Yes,” cried Mary eagerly, “and it’s just what my father would n’t do! He married the little Irish servant girl and his family turned him out. Old Mr. Grinscoombe never spoke to him again. He showered everything on Francis, his other son, and when Francis died, after a very creditable marriage and the

birth of a very creditable daughter, then he gave everything to my Aunt Selda — though I’ve never called her that to her face, mind you; and in his will he left her everything, the money and the mills and the old home my father loved so. I don’t know why Papa never went away from here. He just stayed and worked a little and wrote his wonderful book.” Here Mary straightened and Q felt her excited grip tighten on his hand. “No one will ever read his wonderful book,” she said. “I’ve sent it to lots of publishers. I typed it all, myself — pages and pages of it, and I’ve made fresh copies, but they won’t read it. I know, because I put a hair between the pages and it always comes back not a bit disturbed. I think it must be because of the first two chapters which are rather vague and wandering; they don’t catch your attention, though I never dared to tell him so. But — later on — it’s full of wit and humor — and quaint — and it’s very wise. Darling Papa! Do you know what his name for himself was, Q? — even when he was a little boy, and does n’t it show how those Grinscoombes” — she ground out the hated name as though it had not been her own — “must have treated him! ‘The Earthworm,’ — that’s what he called himself. And he called his book — ‘The Philosophy of an Earthworm.’ When you get your education, you must read it.”

“Yes, ma’am,” said Q gently.

She was sitting up straight and the tears had stopped. Now she drooped again.

“It was after my mother’s death — and, Q, the

passion was love, the very best and most patient love, and it was when he was so poor and my brother was sick and we could n't pay Dr. Sales's bill, that Papa began to — to drink." She had never said this of him before and it made her tremble to say it. "I — we tried so hard to keep him away. And then we'd take turns bringing him home until Harry would n't let me do it any more. But Harry went to New York to work and, afterwards, he came home very, very ill. And died. . .

That was Mary's story. Q listened to it. Except for the two answers she had called for, he made no comments. After the story was told, he pushed a beautiful clean white linen handkerchief marked Q. T. K. by a very expensive linen merchant on Fifth Avenue into Mary's lap and she laughed and blew her nose.

No other man she had ever known or ever would know, perhaps, could have comforted her so sanely and so surely as did this queer pupil of hers.

"Say," he murmured reasonably, "lots of fellers takes their drink and goes home on a crooked trail and none the worse for it. He's sure a real gentleman. But it ain't a lady's business rightly. You let me see to it. I sure know the inside ways of a bar. Lady, likely, if your Pa had a friend who would drink with him, he'd be hittin' the home trail when that friend kissed his glass good-night. I ain't averse to a drink nights, seems more home-like to me, sort of. Will you let me take up this claim, lady?"

She could only thank him; it was hope, a gleam

under the old bridge of her care. All the little shadowed ripples brightened.

After he had left her, she kissed the handkerchief marked Q. T. K. Also, she kept it. And she has it yet.

CHAPTER VII

THE STARS IN THEIR COURSES

No step in Q's education was to prove itself so forwarding as the association which his promise to Mary brought about between him and her father. From two extremes of loneliness the minds of scholar and cowboy drew quickly to a meeting-point. And the friendship was fostered truly — as many a more historic one — by the releasing influence of wine. It was a key to unlock the beauty of Mr. Grinscoombe's wisdom and the gentleness of Q's chivalry. He had guessed right; a friend was Mr. Grinscoombe's need rather than an intoxicant. In fact the sympathetic listener was the more heady potion.

Q anticipated a difficulty in subtracting the little tremulous, vague-eyed figure from its familiar corner of the bar.

"I'm agoin' now, sir," he said that first night, standing above the older man with so gentle an air of deference that to the outcast Grinscoombe, unused to any show of reverence, he had an incalculable force for the restoration of self-respect, "I'm agoin' home, and I was figurin' that the trail'd be less lonesome if you was ready to quit too. Or are you plannin' to linger?"

Half-automatically Henry Grinscoombe got to his feet, buttoning his carefully worn and threadbare coat with nervous fingers. There was a touch on his

arm. He looked down at his glass. The touch forbore to urge, but it seemed to tingle with a need. He found himself moving past a row of uninquiring backs out into the purple splendor of the June night.

"Say," Q murmured, feeling a sort of reactionary quiver in his companion, as though he felt an unbearable reproach in the aspect of the night, "look at them stars! What about getting into the meadows, eh? for a sniff of the hay? Or would you be ready for home?"

"You are proposing a walk with me, Mr. Kinwynden?"

"If you'd be carin' to." It was half-wistful, wholly honest, that deference of Q's. A memory of his dead son afflicted the little shaken gentleman. He put his hand on Q's arm. Their stroll took them along a shadowy side street. Not five minutes later the Earthworm found a listener, a most accomplished holder of his tongue. The stars were the occasion, seen through the gnarled branches of a locust tree. "Scorpio," Mr. Grinscombe greeted it, murmuring as though to a friend, "Scorpio, with Antares like a red jewel."

And he pointed with his slender stick, using the support of Q's young iron arm.

Q lifted up his eyes and recognized a familiar of lonely ranges.

"I did n't know it had a name," he said, "I'd like to savvy that. It always stands there to the south, June nights. I've saw it over Thunder Mountain."

"You don't know their names?" The little man,

excited, moved his stick across the heavens, pointing delicately world upon world, sun upon sun; the wheeling obvious constellations of the north, the more tender and mysterious southerners. He sought an orchard hill-top, climbed a rock. Names and legends began to whirl giddily in Q's head. He knew all at once his vast insignificance in a spinning universe. He had the mysterious comfort of unimportance. They lay in the grass on their backs and from science was born philosophy. The Earthworm discoursed fascinatingly of Myths and Origins. His pure simplicity of speech had the serene directness of the stars. Patterns of knowledge began to marshal themselves in the retentive emptiness of the cowboy's ignorance. An Historical Sense was born suddenly in him. Never after that evening was he in any true sense of the word an ignorant man. The races that had watched those galleon constellations move, that had fastened names to their glittering and haughty prows, that had gravely fashioned shapes of bear and scorpion and lyre, became and remained living and real to him. When they turned back that night, Q, with the poet, felt "chilly and grown old." His brain had stretched itself more powerfully than Mr. Grinscombe's unaccustomed legs. Q left the little man at his door, still flourishing cane and tongue, ready to entertain disciples until dawn. There was a light in Mary's window, and Q, looking up, thought he saw her face looking down, all lighted from within, by relieved surprise.

He went back to Room 90, elated and abashed. He

could n't sleep. What there was in the world to know, to believe, to ponder! What wisdom in the little old shaky head with its triumphant silver crest! “And I was thinkin’ I could help an old drunk — *me!*” There were depths of humility in that “me” which Q’s pride of a savage would never allow any one to discern. He was very near to the awful realization of a Universal God that night. He had an impulse to prayer; perhaps he prayed.

After that, Mary’s father showed an impatience that had not a hint of shame for his evening visit to the bar, but he waited not for a third and fourth potation, but for the tall, swinging figure that rarely failed him. Q drank with and listened to the frequenters of the bar, and when he “kissed” his moderate glass “good-night,” more eager than Q’s prophecy the little gentleman was ready to accompany him. Sometimes they walked, sometimes they went up to Q’s room; sometimes they came back to Mary. And always the old man talked and the young man listened. It ended in Mr. Grinscoombe’s reading aloud chapters from his book of Earthworm Philosophy, for which purpose Q was invited to supper. In the hard, bare life that had been his, the utterly untended battle of its childhood, the single-handed struggle of its youth, there had been nothing like these gentle, sheltered evenings; Mary sewing or reading, moths knocking about the yellow-shaded lamp, Mr. Grinscoombe’s quaint wit, Mary’s humor-sparkles, their kind laughter and teasing, the games they taught him to play and played with him — Sniff and Casino

and Chess and Checkers; the books — besides the Great One — that they read aloud: Mary's face began to live comfortably in his heart and the quick, sweet, tart little sayings and the waggish kindness of her eyes and mouth came very close to his unused affection and soothed him when the lady of his longing had dealt him wounds that would not heal for all his determined self-respect.

It was after one of those woundings, a not altogether unintentional one, for the flames that attract moths sometimes are fed with quite voluntary cruelty, when Q gave Mary a glimpse into the purposefulness of his Sluypenkill existence.

Heloise had a visitor, a New York broker, a wiry and very animated gentleman, who out-talked the glib insects of a July afternoon. It was one of Q's afternoons, by promise, when the broker unexpectedly appeared, but Heloise had thrown over the West-erner's plan for entertainment with scant apology.

"Mr. Van Wenden has come all the way from that sweltering city, Q, so I must give him his reward. I'm going to take him into the garden and give him iced tea. You may come, if you like. You'll be interested in what he says. I'll get him to talk Wall Street" — she teased Q with one of her cool, long-lidded looks. "What do you know about Wall Street? That's part of a man's education."

Q allowed himself an ironical exclamation. "A feller can learn hold-up methods anywheres," he drawled; "Wall Street ain't the one and only school for 'em."

"I believe," she said, watching his expression closely, "that you are jealous of Mr. Van Wenden, Q."

At which he suddenly, and to her, surprisingly, for she was well accustomed to his mask, burned fiery red, neck and cheek and forehead under his eternal tan.

"I'll bid you good-afternoon, Miss Grinscoombe," he said, and left her feeling altogether abashed.

Q's eyes smarted dry under his lids and his throat ached cruelly. "She was makin' a mock of my feelin's for her," he put it to himself; "makin' a mock when I haven't spoken to her in any ways but friendliness." That was what hurt and dimmed his image of her as a shining crescent moon above his camp-fire trees, that, when he practiced day by day his iron self-control, keeping to the plans he had laid down, studying, how hard nobody knew, to be worthy of speaking to her of his love, she, like some cheap town girl, could twit him with as cheap a jealousy. Yes, he was jealous, jealous of the air that touched her cheek, but it was not for her to taunt him with one of the most racking and inevitable of his pangs. Q had not even yet begun to realize the overwhelming weight of convention that hung about Heloise Grinscoombe's neck, could not think from what a conscious social height she doled him out her small favors, could not know that in admitting him at all into the Manor precincts upon a footing of apparent equality with her other friends, she was granting him in her own mind so much that there was little margin left for smaller

generosities. That he had, as Katrina expressed it, "made a perfectly devastating hit," so that even Mrs. Fayre was angling openly for him, had, of course, its due value. Heloise amongst her circle enjoyed the pride of the bear-trainer. She was aware of the silent, graceful beauty and the laughter-provoking originality of her savage, and vain of her power over him; but she held her trainer's whip always ready in her cruel right hand. This — except when at moments, under his eyes, all the insignificant trappings of her soul fell from it and she felt a deep mysterious waver, a fluttering as though a fortress shook. It was that profound confusion, visible more often than she knew, that kept him a prisoner of hope. To a man of his type and experience, the life he now led was galling to every fiber. His hours of study exhausted him, his social experiences bewildered him. He had always practiced self-control, it had been a necessity of his existence, but a million little nerves that had never been teased into consciousness were now daily stung and twisted. Great space, great loneliness, the rare and humorous speech of round-up and range, the quaint nosing ways of pony-friends, the snow-peaks, rose tipped, iron-gray, or purple as goblets filled with wine, the fairy aspen woods, twinkling with round green leaves and flowers, the somber pine trails hushed and haunted, the little sudden meadows all warm and scented, where a startled bull-elk raised his antlered head for a moment's noble hesitation before he yielded to the trotting, unhurried necessity of a retreat, the cottonwoods smoky or ablaze with au-

tumn, the wide gray-green plains noble as the sea — he would wake at night and gasp with a choked longing for such familiars. His ears would be clattering with sharp, rapid, Eastern voices, his sensitive memory pricked with the cold, inquisitive, pleasure-seeking countenance of Eastern folk. Hate and love, which after all are lonely and noble in certain intensities, kept him steady except at such moments of misery as Heloise had dealt him that afternoon with her flippant reference to jealousy. He had his revenge, for Sir Sydney's descendant, self-revealed by Q's flush and look, had smarted for her own vulgarity; but he did n't know this and the knowledge would hardly have been a comfort to him. In fact, he found no comfort until he eased his heart a little by speech. It was a cryptic speech enough — one of his aphorisms.

“Ain't it funny, though,” he said, looking across the table at his schoolmarm, who was threading a needle deftly, leaning close to the lamp so that threads of fire moved about her curly head, “that a woman will say things that a man could n't abear to think about himself . . . things that are so, but that she ought not to let on that she had found them out.”

Mary looked up from her needle. “I don't understand, Q, just what you mean.”

“I mean, that a man can't abear hearin' from a woman that she has seed through him.”

“Can't he, Q? No, that's true. He can't. I've noticed that myself.” She smiled. “I have n't seen through you yet, have I?”

The little father was lost in a volume; he was standing in a peering attitude, candle in hand, at one of the corner bookcases. He might well have been in Mars as far as any intercourse with them was concerned. Q gave him a quick glance.

"No, ma'am," he said earnestly, "you're the most comfortable lady I ever knowed, and common."

For an instant Mary was startled, then translated the term into its correct Western usage and glowed.

"Thank you, Q. I like being that."

"Yes, ma'am. You had ought to. Commonness is awful scarce in Sluypenkill. There's folks that are real low-down and there's an awful lot of re-finement, but mighty little commonness. Say, ain't Mrs. Stopper's crowd re-fined, now?"

"Yes," Mary twinkled over her sewing, "they are — frightfully. How do you get to know so many people, Q?"

"I don't rightly savvy, ma'am. Jest by holdin' my tongue, I figure. I'm the only human in Sluypenkill that'll do any listenin'. Folks are clean loco tryin' to get a hearin'. When I have got my edication I ain't agoin' to be half so popular."

"What woman was it that made the mistake of seeing through you?" Mary asked.

He gave her no direct reply.

"Lots of folks," he said, "cries for the moon, but almighty few's willin' to work for it.

"I have found out somethin' about an edication, ma'am," he went on — and for the first time she saw the strained look about his mouth that Heloise looked

at unseeingly so often — “that it ain’t to be had rightly out of books. You are doin’ the very best you can, ma’am, but I reckon it’s too late for me. The kind of edication that counts atween a man and woman is somethin’ different, and if I was to talk as straight as a dictionary and knowed all the history and geography there is and spoked languages and played on the py-anny with all ten fingers like that little feller that lets the ladies call him a poodle-dog” — this mysterious reference was to the curly “Pom,” who would have been surprised by it — “it would n’t rightly help me any. When you come right down to it, it’s got to be somethin’ deeper than that.”

She saw his hand clench and his face lose its color. There was real anguish in his eyes. Her heart swelled to her throat.

“Dear Q,” she said, “you have it — that deeper thing.”

He looked at her as though in the midst of his apparent composure he had lost the power of speech.

“You want your education” — she asked softly — “for *that*?”

He nodded, and his eyes, after their strange and beautiful fashion, deepened and opened inwardly, until she saw his heart.

“Ah, Q!” It was an exclamation most pitiful, most understanding. It made him wince. He turned away and sat looking ahead of him. She watched his profile — a bronze bas-relief against the lighter tint of the wall. It would not quiver, but it seemed to

sharpen. She searched her very soul for comfort and encouragement for him.

"She — she would have to be blind if she could n't love you, Q."

He shook his head, still staring in front of him.

"Loving," said Mary, putting down her work and holding it below the table edge with hands that shook, "goes deeper than education, Q. It's a man and woman thing, you know."

At that he turned to her as though she had kindled a sudden torch.

"That's what she said once," he murmured; "that's what I'm holdin' fast to."

Mary was, at heart, a mother, and that she had found the medicine for his hurt comforted her own rarely. Her spirit sang because now she knew how to help him. Q, looking at her, saw a beauty that had been altogether denied to his childhood, shining in her small face. He had an impulse to kneel down and put his head on her knees so that the comfort of her hands might hover over him. The little room was filled with an exquisite human silence.

Mr. Grinscoombe, looking up from his volume, contemplated them as through a telescope from Mars.

CHAPTER VIII

THE LETTER F

WHEN a man is very deeply engaged in courtship and when his courtship is attended with extraordinary difficulties, even a little thing becomes a dragon in his path. It was not long after the simultaneous beginning of his education and his determined effort to guide Heloise back into the interrupted trail of their Western intimacy, when a certain little habit of his lady's began to be a torment to Q's nerves. With her delicate forefinger, with a bit of a twig, with the tip of a riding-switch, with an idle pencil, Heloise had a fashion of aimlessly, absently making on any surface the outline of a letter F. It would not always be F to begin with; perhaps it would only be a confused series of hieroglyphics, but after she had been at it for a while, there would begin to be the unmistakable formation of an F. There was nothing that she did — no slightest movement, no change of expression or of manner — which his eyes missed. He very rarely made a personal comment, but at last, on a July day, his painful curiosity as to the meaning of her preoccupation with that spectral capital F forced itself through his reticence.

It was during one of their rides. Q's instinct, or perhaps, his shrewd intelligence, had told him that his best chance lay in re-creating as much as possible the atmosphere of their first intercourse. Not long af-

ter his arrival, when he had endured a few of Lelo's parties at the Manor — parties in the atmosphere of which he, not realizing the electric power of his native wit and controlled vitality, felt himself to dwindle, to be forced outside the magic circle which, with her Eastern friends, she drew about her like a spreading robe — he came up to the Manor on horseback, a second horse on the lead. Unmistakably Western ponies these, even to the high-horned saddles.

To Lelo's exclamations of pleasure and surprise, to her questions, Q, busy with the stirrup fastenings, had murmured vaguely something about the Sluypenkill Livery Stable.

"Their mounts have improved vastly, then," she had said.

"Well, ma'am, these two was stuck off away out of sight. Nobody's got any use for a real Westerner in Sluypenkill." Lelo had answered the sudden smile with which he had looked up after this small thrust with one that had lost a great deal of its coldness. She ran upstairs to pull out her Western riding-clothes and came down looking once more so like the golden-haired wild-rose boy of camp and trail that Q's blood lifted from heart to cheek. He could have shouted when he saw her eyes falter away from his. That was one of the glorious moments that repaid him for hours of patient pain. After that, they had ridden together often. Miss Selda would come out to watch them off. It was increasingly true that she enjoyed her talks with Q, and that he, in spite of much secret "winching" under the skillful jabs in which her

tongue delighted, had developed a most curious passionate interest concerning her. He watched her as a supple cat watches for a mouse — the little timid hiding mouse of her character, timid beyond the habit even of mice. But Q's watchfulness had a more than feline patience.

"You and Aunt Selda make me nervous," Heloise had said once after she had watched one of their curious interviews. "I don't know why — but I feel that something's going to explode some day."

"*I ain't agoin' to do no explodin',*" said Q, and Miss Selda, oddly enough, had deeply blushed.

Not under Miss Selda's eye, nor for her experimental kindlings, did Q explode. It was Lelo's little half-conscious F that struck first fire from him. They were sitting on that occasion in a tremulous thicket of birch high up in one of the mountain meadows which Q explored — these old, old meadows in round-headed hills so different from the sky-scraping, snow-hollowed rocks of Wyoming. Through the thicket dashed a slim white brook — a naked truant, glittering and shy. Lights from the water, shadows from the leaves flickered about them, they were in a medium of restless murmur and motion, whispering, babbling, urgent, secret voices. They were more than usually silent; with Q, as with most Westerners, there was no necessity for speech. He lay at his length; Heloise, having borrowed his knife, was whittling awkwardly at a piece of stick. Her face was as tranquil as a little girl's. Q watched the golden-brown lashes throwing steady little lines of shadow under

the long, half-hidden brightness of her eyes. Her pink, slender lips were laid quietly together — just the hint of bitterness in their delicate corners. From her face, his eyes wandered to her hands. They had cut a smooth flat space on the round side of the stick. As he watched, he saw, fascinated, that she had begun to carve a letter F. The blood suddenly drummed in his ears. He sat up all in one rippling movement and bent close to her work.

“Why — F?” he asked in a queer voice.

She did not look up or pause in her work, but spoke rapidly with more passion than he had ever heard in her level voice. “Because I hate the letter F! Because I hate it!” Her pupils suddenly dilated and a glow seemed to shine from somewhere deep within her through the clearness of her face. “And because I love it.” She looked at Q defiantly with those dilated eyes and bent her mouth down as though she meant to press it to her F.

His hand shot out. “Don’t you!” he cried sharply. Her lips just brushed his intruding hand. She gave a little angry cry. “Take your hand away!” she said, and, thinking that the warning would be enough, she cut at her stick a little above his fingers, meaning to cut in under the initial. But her blade slipped and drove deep into his wrist.

“Oh, oh, Q!” she cried in dazed repentance. “I did n’t really cut you, did I?”

He shook his head and wrapped his handkerchief around the wound and, standing up, moved quickly away from her. Presently he came back, leading the

two horses. "I reckon it's time for this party to be over," he said heavily. His face was the color of palest bronze.

They rode across the mountain meadow and down into the thicket through which Q crushed a random trail until they plunged down an abrupt bank to the road. Heloise, riding up, saw that even his lips were white. He had put the injured hand into his coat pocket, and she, glancing down, gave a little start of dismay. The pocket was a pouchful of blood, oozing red, which trickled slowly down against the saddle flap. She pulled up her horse. "Q, you must get to the doctor, quick!" He said nothing, but looked at her with a strange deep look as though he were trying to see into her heart and had not listened to her speech. She spurred forward, and his horse involuntarily quickened. So they galloped by side lanes into the town. Lelo was half a length ahead when she threw up her arm and pulled in sharply, looking back at him with a face of vast relief.

"There's Dr. Sales's electric," she said; "he's visiting one of these little houses."

Q looked at her steadily for an instant, then turned a slow ironic glance upon the shining motor and the shabby house.

"Yes, ma'am," he said, "we'll go in." He slipped from his horse and Lelo, coming quickly to his side, caught at his arm.

"Why, Q, dear, you can hardly stand!"

"I feel kind of f-funny — like my legs was agoin' to

buck." However, when a small grave girl opened the door to their ringing, he took off his hat with a sweeping Western gesture and performed the introduction gallantly.

"Miss Mary Grinscoombe," he said, with one of his sudden candid smiles, "meet Miss Heloise Grinscoombe," and he stood back and watched them keenly.

For the two girls it was a moment of acute embarrassment. Heloise was scarlet and Mary white, her head up and Lelo's down. Mary spoke first, because she had seen Q's face.

"You're hurt!" she said.

"It's a cut on his wrist. We — we saw Dr. Sales's car — " Heloise stammered.

"Oh, I see. Please come in. Yes, he is here."

"Your father ain't — I mean, is n't," Q corrected himself with a scared look at his schoolmarm, "sick, is he?"

"Oh, no. It's a social visit. Dr. Sales and I are playing chess." She led them in, still with the proud little lift of her chin, although her eyes were entirely absorbent of anxiety. "Dr. Sales, please!" she said, "my Q — my scholar's here. He's hurt."

Dr. Sales, who was bending over a chess-board, rose stupendously, looming up in the tiny room. He was a wide, dusty-looking figure of a man, with so large and soft an expanse of face and body that he gave the impression of confined fluidity. His brown smooth suit, made of a fine cloth better suited to a woman, held swinging folds of fat at rest; the skin of

his face was like the surface of huddled cream loose about a short nose and an easily moved mouth. His small eyes were bright as little sparks between puffy lids. He was, for all this softness and flabbiness, not an unpleasant-looking man. He had an air of easy good-humor, a soft, pliable, complaisant air and the boyish expression given by curly hair. His smile melted in and out of its creamy medium. His hands moved softly about his person, now in pockets, now across the broad waistcoat, now with stroking motions along his knees — large, tender hands, seeking and sliding and undecided. They, and the temper they expressed, had brought him, it would seem, many easy rewards of search. His habitually satisfied expression signaled success without much effort. He looked, at this moment, however, like a huge vessel empty of every emotion but surprise. From Lelo to Mary he turned the little spark-like eyes.

Q solved the immediate embarrassment of the occasion by falling at his full length in complete silence to the floor.

“He’s cut an artery and severed a tendon,” was Dr. Sales’s verdict. “He’ll have to be sewed up. Fraction of an inch more’n’ he’d have lost the use of his hand — the nerve there. I’d better take him to the hospital.”

Q’s dense and cindery eyelashes half-lifted. There was a little steely gleam thin as a knife-edge. He spoke in a slow whisper.

“I would n’t get dragged into that hospital, on a rope,” he said, and paused. There was a complete

stillness in the room. "I've went through it," continued the same self-possessed whisper; "they have told me the story of that feller — the mill-hand, who come down with blood-poisonin'."

Dr. Sales's face was blotched yellow and white.

"You fix me up here, doc," Q went on. He put out a hand and took Lelo's hanging by her side. "I'll lay hold of Miss Grinscoombe here; if *she* don't go out of the room, I guess I'm safe." He said this with one of his small grim smiles. Heloise stared at Dr. Sales. The blotches were swallowed up by a sort of purple surge.

"He's out of his head," said Heloise. "Can you do it here, Dr. Sales?"

The doctor mumbled something about his "surgical case, ready for the little DeLaneey boy," and left the room. While he was gone, no one spoke. Heloise gazed down at Q, who had closed his eyes. There were bright spots of color in her cheeks. Mary said hurriedly, "I'll get some water."

When she came back, Dr. Sales was preparing the little room for an operation.

"You'd get ether at the hospital, my friend," he said dryly to his patient, "and here you won't. But I suppose an Indian like you prefers pain to the ordinary civilized treatment, eh?"

"I won't howl any," said Q, and laid himself out on the wicker lounge they had made ready for him. He had let go of Lelo's hand.

"Don't you stay," he said. "It won't be pretty. And I was talkin' for doc's benefit when I said you'd

hev to see me through. You gels step outside. I'll holler when it's over."

Heloise went out to the little porch and Mary made a pretense of following, but just outside of the sitting-room door she stopped, where she was hidden from Q, but where she could watch the doctor's movements. Before the operation was well under way, she was called in to help. It was a difficult piece of work and took time. Q lay rigid, twice he relaxed silently into unconsciousness. When it was over, he drew a deep sigh.

"She can come in now," he said, and Mary's eyes filled with tears, sudden, hot, inexplicable. She ran out of the room and upstairs. In her bedroom she locked her door as carefully as though some one had been in dangerous pursuit, walked over to her bureau, and, resting on her hands, which held tightly to the edge, she stared unseeingly into a face that she might not have recognized.

"Oh, Mary," she said rapidly to that unseen image. "Oh, Mary, please don't be a fool!" Then she walked over to her bed and lay there in a stillness as rigid as Q's own. She was looking for the first time into the eyes of young love and she found them stony and implacable.

For a long time she looked, until she had conquered the rebel in her heart. She stood up, stayed for a minute with hands pressed to her eyes, and went slowly down the stairs. This time she passed the sitting-room door without a glance and let herself out on the porch. The whole house-front was in a glow of sun-

set, and Mary stood in it with her eyes lifted above the huddled house-roofs to the sky. Slowly the sweetness of her young face conquered its bitterness. Heloise, coming up behind her and just touching her arm, was startled by the light of this small dark face as it turned from the sunset to her.

“Oh, Mary” — Heloise found the beginning difficult — “I feel that I must say something to you before I leave. I don’t know what you think of me. I’m afraid I’ve been a shameful coward. Q thinks so. But — but — it has been difficult. Aunt Selda — ”

Mary had returned from her moment of exaltation. She began to tremble a little, as strong feeling always made her tremble.

“I have n’t been thinking of you or of me,” she said, the brogue thickening on her tongue. “It’s not myself at all that’s been hurt, Heloise. And it’s not you that I’ve been blaming all these years. These hard things have n’t been our fault, have they? Yours and mine?”

Heloise’s delicate clear face was on fire. “Oh, I don’t know,” she said, trying to keep her woman-of-the-world lightness. “Certainly not yours, Mary. There was nothing for you to do. But, perhaps, I — if I had tried.”

“Would your aunt have let you do anything? What, in any case, was there for you to do?” And Mary seemed more the woman of the world.

“But, Mary, she’s *our* aunt.”

Mary, leaning against the railing, hands locked behind her, smiled faintly. “Ah, well!” she said, “I’ve

had time to forget that. Yes, as you see, I *am* bitter — for Papa. It's been so many years for him. And he loved that place — that home. I think he even loved his people. He has a far better heart than I have, Heloise.”

“I think,” said Heloise, “that you probably have the best heart in the world. Q tells me things about you — ”

So sure was Mary of his loyalty that she smiled.

“Does he?”

Heloise looked shrewdly down at her.

“I wonder if you like him as much as I do?” she asked.

To which the other girl replied softly with all her waggish wistfulness of Irish eyes and voice, “Oh, I *hope* not!” and started to go in.

Lelo caught her hand as she went by. “Mary, I'm going to try to be your friend!”

Mary was generous. “Thank you,” she said with a simplicity which, after all, was a complete expression of her pride.

They went in together.

Dr. Sales's patient was sitting up on the wicker lounge, his arm in a sling. A faint tinge of color had returned to his face. He got to his feet as the girls entered.

“I'm agoin' to be took home — taked home, I mean” — this with a furious sudden flush, for he felt that he had leapt from the frying-pan of one error into the fire of another — “by doc. Ain't that kind of him? It ain't far to the River Hotel and I've

heard talk that he's a steady driver. Thank you kindly, Miss Grinscoombe, for letting me use your room. First off I have made it into a schoolhouse and now I have made it into a hospital. Your father will be coming soon. Would you please ask him if he'd be carin' to come around to visit with me this evening. I'll sure be lonesome without the use of my right hand — no copy to-morrow, ma'am!"

"How am *I* to get home?" Heloise demanded with a certain petulance. She found herself suddenly hurt by the look of Q's eyes resting during his speech tenderly and with an immense reverence on his little teacher's face.

But the eyes at first did not change their direction. "Doc's fixed it for you," he answered absently, "on the telephone. Your aunt's sending a motor for you and a feller from the stables is to come for the hosses — " Then he did turn fully toward her and held out his left hand.

"I ain't done askin' questions," he said grimly, "about that letter of yours."

Her face flushed. "Oh, you won't get very far with that — my dear Q. That letter does n't mean very much in my young life." She laughed her gay, cool, little laugh. "I might just as easily take to making a 'Q,' " she said.

With that she left him, looking suddenly paler than ever, and she went out and stood beside the motor watching his slower departure.

The doctor's complexion was still blotchy. He said good-bye to Mary rather sullenly and did not smile

even at Miss Selda Grinscoombe's more important niece. He sat himself down heavily beside Q and started his car with a jerk that made the patient wince.

Almost before they had left the curb he began, turning his great body sideways. "Now you will have to account for yourself, Mr. Kinwydden," he said. "I object to being tracked about this place by an ar-rant outsider like yourself. Sluypenkill is my place of business as well as my home. I am a respected and not unimportant citizen." His effort to be forceful and awful shook his cheeks and the folds hammocked in his waistcoat. "You will get yourself into very serious trouble if you are not careful. I insist upon some sort of explanation from you, and upon apology and a promise to desist from actionable annoyance. Do you understand me?"

Q's pale, quiet face met the doctor's little fiery eyes with its imperturbability. After a minute, "Explain yourself," spluttered the doctor. "Don't think that I have n't heard of you — of your prying visit to the Mills Hospital, of your call upon the editor of Sluypenkill 'News,' of your general scandal-mongering amongst my patients. Come, now, your hold-up methods won't go down with me. Other people have found me a difficult enemy. I've run a couple of youngsters out of this town —"

"You don't say?" murmured Q, and the doctor wished this information unspoken. He stumbled on.

"You've got no job to lose, but you have your interests here — don't think I have n't seen that,

presumptuous as such intentions may be on the part of a nameless foundling from a cow-camp. And let me tell you, your chance of visiting out at Grinscoombe Manor is a slim chance if I register my vote against you. Do you understand? You're there distinctly on my sufferance, quite distinctly — I mean" — he puffed under Q's unchanging look — "I mean as a family friend, as a family physician, my word has weight."

"It had ought to have plenty of that," murmured the Westerner sweetly and allowed his eye to run down over the multiplied folds.

The motor took a corner rather carelessly and slid with diminished speed along the main street.

"Hi, you, Q, what yo' doin' in *that* car?" called a young workman in dingy overalls returning from the mills with his lunchbox in his hand.

The doctor flushed. "You think," he began again a trifle breathlessly, "that you have been clever at picking up acquaintances. "I've noticed that, during the month of your stay here, you've got to know all the riff-raff of the place." The car stopped. "Here's your hotel. Before you get out, I want that promise and that apology."

"You ain't agoin' to get 'em, doc," Q answered gently. "I don't exactly savvy what you kin do about it."

"I'm going, for one thing, to cut short your social career, as well as your education — which will probably hurt Miss Mary more than it will you —"

"You've got a drag with Miss Mary same's with

the old lady.” Q said this as though he had made a statement to himself.

The doctor was aware of a frightened contraction of his nerves, but he ignored it. He managed, however, a change of tone.

“You’d rather have me for a friend than for an enemy, would n’t you, young man?” he asked. “Can you have too many friends in this somewhat ambitious career you have chosen for yourself?”

Q’s steady gaze had become a sort of torment, an X-ray burning into the doctor’s most sensitive and secret nerve centers; cold and gray and terribly searching — Sales wanted to put up his hands between himself and it.

“Yes, sir,” Q was speaking, “I sure need your friendship. But it’s a luxury I can’t afford to treat myself to. There’s some things too dirty to handle. I’ll hev to ask you to keep on bein’ my enemy.”

“I believe” — Dr. Sales chose his words carefully, hunting as though for a sharp and painful instrument — “that Miss Grinscombe has some small use for you at present, in her scheme for her niece. When you have served her purpose, I shall see that your intercourse with Grinscombe Manor is at an end. After all, the apology is unimportant. You may get out.”

Q climbed down slowly. He was weak from pain and loss of blood, but his companion made not even a gesture of assistance. On the pavement, Q turned and looked steadily at Dr. Sales. The cool, brilliant eyes gathered light.

"Thanks," he said gravely as though he meant it, and walked rapidly and with grace into the hotel.

That cryptic word of gratitude, as for some service rendered, wormed itself uncomfortably deep into the doctor's consciousness. He drove away with uncertainty at heart. He had said too much. His memory, weighted by Q's silence and stung by his caustic and amazing bit of knowledge, accused him of infantile volubility. If only the fellow had been goaded into angry speech, instead of silently, coolly collecting some sort of information with those terrible gray eyes! But, pshaw! the doctor reassured himself, his uncertain hands sliding about the steering-wheel. "I'm safe; I'm safe." The comfortable look of huddled cream came back slowly to his face.

CHAPTER IX

MORE ABOUT THE LETTER F

FERDINAND FADDEN, deep in a wide wicker chair, a tall beaded glass at his elbow, gazed fixedly at Heloise from under his heavy lids. With the hand not occupied with his drink, he twisted the spiked end of a tiny blond mustache. His eyes, large and very blue, were contemplative, indolent and sultry, like the August day. Outside the shadow of the Manor veranda, insect voices droned and swelled like rising and falling waves, the sun gleamed across the molten steel surface of the river above which the air quivered like the air inside a furnace.

Ferdinand's body of an athlete glowed inside the thin silk of his shirt, his face was burnt brick-red up to a white line across his forehead just below the dense straight border of his blond hair. There was a forward thrust to his mouth and jaw which gave him an expression of insolent discontent; it needed all the lazy serenity of eyes and brow and pose to counteract the look.

"Your aunt," said Ferdinand, "does n't like me a little bit. When I buzzed in to-day her face was about as welcoming as a bank safe."

Heloise lay amongst cushions in a canvas swinging lounge. She seemed oppressed by a heavy languorous excitement, her face was pale and her eyes struggled away from his, coming back continually with a

fluttering uncertainty; it was as though she felt a younger and more helpless Heloise; the artificial self-possession of her usual little manner had left her somewhat shy and without defense. Nevertheless, she answered him daringly with an effort at her cool, staccato laugh.

"She's afraid," said Lelo, "that I'm going to lose my head over you." Her voice was a trifle breathless.

"I wish there was a chance of it!" he flung out sulkily. "If Lucy had n't got me in for this blamed yachting trip, so that I had to cut off and leave you —" he paused, for Lelo's cheeks had kindled and there was a lift to her head which he recognized as a danger signal.

"If you had n't — ?" she angled for a further justification of her anger.

"If I had n't had to leave you," he murmured with a sudden gentleness as droning as the gentleness of insect voices, "I might have had a peaceful summer instead of the sort of — hell I've been put through for these past two months. Don't be nasty to me now, will you, Lelo? Something's changed you while I've been away. You were a whole lot sweeter to me last winter — last spring."

"I — I — you can't expect me to be sweet to a deserter, Ferdy. You went off to be gay and left me here in this dull hole to bore myself to death. Sluypenkill is not exactly a round of excitement for me — when you're away."

"You little flirt! How many hearts have you been

breaking in revenge for my desertion, eh? Desertion!” He echoed it ironically. He leaned forward, resting the thrusting jaw on his two large handsome hands; his eyes seemed to darken and thicken in color like a thunderous sky. “You know just how much of a desertion it was, Lelo! Why do you cut me like that? It hurts confoundedly.” He wrinkled his brows into two dents, a surprisingly boyish attempt at a frown of injury. “Lucy —” he said, and paused, then went on hurriedly in a lower tone — “Well, it is n’t as if she deserved any consideration from me.”

“I’d rather you would n’t talk about your wife, Ferdinand.”

He got up, walked to the edge of the veranda and stretched his arms high over his head. “O Lord!” he groaned; then, dropping his arms, he strode over to her and stood looking down at her. Lelo lifted her long, clear eyes and they were held by his. There followed a heavy silence in which the fragrance of clematis, of heliotrope, of mignonette, became as insistent as a chanted melody. A little moisture showed in a bright line above Ferdinand’s lower lids. He caught at her hand. “You — you beautiful!” he choked over the exclamation, then went on quickly, his rather heavy lips fumbling over the words. “You’ll come out to-night? About ten? There’s a moon. If you think your aunt will make a fuss, I’ll stop out at the gate. I won’t toot for you. If you’ll be prompt. I can’t stand waiting — not for *you!*”

She nodded slowly, heard a sound, and stood up, withdrawing her hand. He turned hastily to see what she was looking at.

"I want you," she said, "to meet my Western friend, Mr. Kinwydden." The heavy, sultry, languorous excitement lifted from her face.

Q had come up the veranda steps and was advancing toward them.

A sudden cold north wind blowing into a fever-room could not have been more destructive to the atmosphere of Ferdinand's love-making than was the presence of the Westerner. He had never looked more grim and cool. Four days of pain and imprisonment and hard thinking in the hotel bedroom had thinned his face and paled its bronze. To Mary he had once said — "Temper is a mighty bad thing to lose, but a mighty fine thing to keep — it settles your head like egg-shells does coffee." If it could be confined to the thinking rather than the feeling portion of the mind, he had discovered, it acted as a powerful clarifier. It seemed to burn up in cold fire the non-essential observations. But his anger, though controlled, was of a quite primitive intensity. By Dr. Sales he had been called "a nameless foundling from a cow-camp"; his ardent and humble hope had been flouted as laughable, insolent; the purpose to which he had bent the steel fibers of his will had been named presumption; he had been told that the lady of the Manor had some "small use" for him and that when he had filled this minor use, he was to suffer an ignominious turning-out. He knew that this last was not an idle threat. Better men, by Dr. Sales's own admission — a boast which Q had since taken pains to verify — had been run out of Sluypenkill for daring to criticize the lazy

and inefficient methods of its physician. Dr. Sales's indolence and incapacity had grown through protected years to almost criminal proportions, but for some reason he was established above punishment. Q, prowling about Number 90 or lying rigid on its bed with his well hand clenched above his head, had pondered over Dr. Sales, weighing and dissecting the scraps of evidence incautiously dropped by the man about himself, until a surprisingly clear, consistent, and penetrative picture of his career had marshaled itself in the cowboy's shrewdly observant intelligence. He had won more than thinness and pallor from his confinement.

"This is Ferdinand Fadden, Q," said Heloise, "an old friend of mine — your hand is n't well yet, is it? Still in a sling."

"It's well enough for some things," said Q slowly; there was a smile in the eyes he fixed upon Ferdinand, a reminiscent sort of smile, "but I'm not doing any hand-shaking yet. Mr. Ferdinand Fadden will hev to excuse me."

Fadden appraised him negligently. It was a puzzling apparition; his eyes appealed to Heloise.

"Q was one of our guides out West last fall, Ferdy — on the hunting trip I took with Mrs. Fayre and Tommy — you know."

"U-m, I see." Fadden turned away from him as though he had lost interest. "Well, I'll leave you to your Western reminiscences." He took her hand, trying by a look to bring back the heat to her face and eyes. But it had vanished past immediate recall.

"To-night?" he moved his lips to make the word and, as she nodded, he walked triumphantly away, passing Q with a curt nod.

"I'm going out there myself after big game one of these days," he said, hanging on his heel. "Better sign up with me while you're here, Q. How many parties have you got out of Sluypenkill, eh?"

"Mr. Kinwydden is not here to sign up hunting parties, Ferdy."

"What the deuce-o, after big game himself, is he?" Fadden lifted his eyebrows and glanced sardonically back at Heloise. A queer, silent ripple seemed to pass over Q's body from head to foot, though he said nothing and did not even change his mask.

Said Heloise quickly, "He's a dead-sure shot!"

"Oh, you need n't try to frighten me. I'll be careful. I know my West. Father made his fortune in cattle, you know, when there were fortunes to be made at that particular game. He wanted me to be a cowboy — Jove! He did, Lelo! I've visited cow-camps, though you might n't think it — eh, Q?"

The Westerner stood silent and expressionless.

"Visitin' cow-camps," he said, drawling his words a little, and Lelo found herself suddenly attacked by mirth at Ferdinand's expense. The picture, surprisingly complete, Q's tone drew of that gentleman's social ventures in the West compelled amusement. The victim missed the impulse. He went away tingling slightly as though his vanity, like a funny-bone, had been numbed.

"Visitin' cow-camps," repeated Q, taking the

chair Ferdinand had left. He seemed, all at once and rather inexplicably, in the sweetest of gay good-humors.

"Say, gel, give me one of those long drinks like the one you gave Fer-dee-nand, will you?"

She granted this request and watched him, the amusement still twinkling over her face. His meeting with Fadden had touched, for some reason, a conversational spring, for he began to talk to her as he talked sometimes when they were alone, out West over a camp-fire or riding on a belated trail together under the stars — splendid heady talk, of adventure, spicy as sage, tangy as mountain air, delightful with unexpected traps of humor into which a listener plunged with mirth-releasing suddenness. Lelo forgot the heat of the late afternoon and of a certain emotion that both shamed and thrilled her. She sat up childlike, with wide eyes and parted, smiling lips. There was no further mention of Fadden until Miss Selda appeared, gowned in delicate black lace, a long, plummy fan hanging at the length of its chain at her side. Q rose to greet her and received a smile and the welcoming gesture of her upturned hand.

Her gray, stone-colored, slow eyes traveled searchingly about the veranda.

"So Ferdinand has gone and there is only one young man to be asked to dinner. You'll stay, Q."

It was a command and he acquiesced. He was not so talkative at dinner. Miss Grinscombe's condescensions forbade the lifting of his visor; besides, he was still careful concerning knives and forks and

table deportment; the waitress especially disturbed his equanimity, or rather the necessity he was under to exclude her from the conversation. He had made the blunder of cordially including her at first, and later smarted in bewilderment under Lelo's instructions. After dinner, imprisoned in the South Parlor under the eyes of Sir Sydney Grinscombe, he was entirely mute, secretly observant of Lelo's increasing restlessness. Miss Selda read aloud inflexibly from the evening paper. She was not unaware herself of her niece's fittings and nervous fingerings of this object and that. When the girl slipped out with an indistinguishable murmur of excuse, Miss Selda folded her newspaper and laid it quickly down across her knees, clenching her hands about it. So she sat for five minutes, stone still, staring as though at something she unwillingly remembered. The long yellow curtains were then parted, between which for an instant Heloise's beauty glimmered. She was carrying a crimson cloak across her arm. It streamed down her white dress almost to the floor. Her golden head was dark, brightly outlined against the hall light. Her eyes were distended, and spots of color burned in her cheeks.

"I am going out for a little spin with Ferdy," she said without defiance, but without deference — a neutral tone in curious contrast to her vivid and excited look. Immediately she let the curtains fall and ran out of the house.

Miss Selda lifted her head on its long throat and set her lips together. Her eyes moved to Q and he

was aware of an appeal, proud, deep, unspoken. He could see the band of velvet on her neck move as she swallowed nervously.

"You got no call to be afeared of *me*, Miss Grinscoombe," said Q gently.

It was perhaps the strangest speech ever addressed to her, and her reception of it was no less strange. She let it pass with a queer little shrinking movement as though it had sped just above her shoulder like a dart. She kept her eyes fixed upon him, and slowly she lifted her hand to her mouth and laid it across her lips; the quiver of them must be hidden, now that it could no longer be controlled. She spoke behind the hand indistinctly.

"I could not bear it for Heloise," she said mysteriously. And then: "You must help me with her — the man is bad through and through, dangerous, selfish, passionate; he — he excites her." She said it in a manner absolutely different from her usual deliberate choice of impeccable syllables — a manner of groping helplessness, monotonous in tone.

Q was so white that she might have noticed it. Perhaps she did, but his pain was no affair of hers. The tyrant may torture the slave that sees his treasure, with impunity; the relief of a confidence is all the necessity.

"You have influence with her," went on the queer voice. Miss Selda dropped her hand. Her lips were still twisted out of their usual composure. The hand clenched itself on her knees and she leaned forward slightly with the tense appearance of a traveler who is

impelled by an inner urgency to tighten nerves and muscles as though by so doing he could force the vehicle to greater speed.

“You are a man and you are her lover. Your influence over her just now is ten times stronger than mine. You must hold her back from the dangers of her own temperament. You don’t realize those dangers — how could you? But you must take my word for them. Whatever you are — you — you love her as I could wish her to be loved, as, in her wiser moments, she wants to be loved. That kind of love expresses itself in service. This — this horrible thing began last winter. She was bored, disappointed — she expects too much of life. He has a certain charm. He can make love. You can see that by looking at him. Once, Q” — she seemed to choose with white-hot certainty the surest goad, the most stinging lash to action — “I saw those heavy lips of his on her hand, and I saw in her face that it meant evil for her. I’ve been studying you, been watching your extraordinary power over her. She swings back to sanity, to wholesome girlhood in your company as though you were a sort of magnet. But he can pull her away from you. He can appeal to her sympathies. He is miserably married to a woman who plays fast and loose with his life and her own. He has been fatally brought up. The money of a parvenu crammed into his pockets since his babyhood. His will has never been crossed. He is as greedy as a spoiled child, as willful, as undisciplined. He has n’t an ideal or a standard or a moral anchor in his soul. He’s a highwayman. I wish

I could make you feel the danger he is to her — romantic, excitable as she is. I tell you, the way he looks at her is an insult. He wants to possess her. He wants to break her delicate pride to his own unbridled will."

She stopped, breathless. In astonishing contrast came Q's quiet, slow voice.

"Some of that is real bronc, Miss Grinscoombe, and a whole lot of it is hokey-pokey. I mean to tell you that you hev lost your head a little. She ain't near so far gone as that you have pictured it and he has still got the fear of God in his heart. I have seen them together jest once and I knowed right off that some of what you have been tellin' is there. He is makin' love to her almighty hard, for all he's worth, I reckon. And she —" Q stopped abruptly, stood up and walked across the room to stand beneath Sir Sydney Grinscoombe, his back turned to Miss Selda, staring unseeingly up into the wedge-like and contemptuous face of the portrait.

"I can't quirt myself into talkin' about her thataway," Q whispered.

After an instant he came back and stood beside Miss Selda.

"Don't you worry," he said; "quit troublin' your heart about the gel. I figured from watchin' you you hev had a bad fright onct and it's left you sort of head-shy." Miss Selda winced and the uncontrollable tremble assailed her restored rigidity. "I savvy how you feel. A hoss went over backwards with me onct and hurt me bad and it made a plumb coward out of

me about bein' reared with. Let a hoss go back a little and my courage turns upside down inside of me."

"But you'll watch over her, Q?"

She was looking up at him as from a sinking ship. He took the hand she held up and it was cold in his grip. Q's steady and pitiful look respected her self-revelation. He was still white from the quite sickening pain her word pictures had given him, but for the first time in her presence he made use of his candid smile. It fell over her like the gleam of a knightly sword.

"Yes, ma'am," he said.

Curiously, as she received the assurance, she could no longer meet his eyes. Hers fell; she drew her hand away and a deep flush came over her face.

"She's plumb ashamed of herself for treatin' me like a human critter," Q interpreted it, "for showin' herself to be a woman."

But his interpretation was not the right one. Shame Miss Selda did feel, and a profound shaken astonishment at his perspicacity. But it was a shame vastly mitigated by his unimportance. The feeling that provoked the blush was, however, from a deeper cause. That she had this feeling at all proved that beneath the pride and selfishness and hardness of her worldliness Q had touched one small soft spot that might once have been the germ of compunction. When he had gone she sat for a long time looking up into Sir Sydney Grinscombe's face. Her composure was once more intact and there was a fine little triumphant smile about her lips.

“We are of one blood — thou and I,” answered the small smile of Sydney Grinscoombe.

But Q could have no knowledge of that small grim smile of hers; as he sped townwards through the night filled with the deep white magic of a full summer moon he was at once lashed and exultant. For all his pain, he had taken, he thought, a stronghold and even a powerful friend. The Sphinx in his path with its stony, inimical idea had softened into flesh and blood. She knew of his clean love and she approved it. She had chosen him to be Lelo’s defender and bid his suit Godspeed. Her influence over her niece Q knew to be incalculable, and he felt half-certain of ultimate victory in spite of a burning anguish in his breast. Out there, somewhere along the moonlit roads, Heloise was speeding beside the man from whom it had become his duty to protect her. And the man was, fantastically enough, the very “Ferdinand kid” that had procured him the one great humiliation of his life. He felt now not the slightest desire to pass on the thrashing; his feeling went unfathomably deeper than any such childish futility of revenge. Ferdinand Fadden — he kept repeating the name meaninglessly, then was struck of a sudden still — mind and body, yes, and beating heart. The letter F — Lelo’s face aglow, her lips bent to cover it — he felt their velvet touch again on his intruding hand. He went on stumblingly, his eyes blinded by fear.

CHAPTER X

WANTED — A LISTENER

LONGMAN'S School Arithmetic flew across Room 90, came into violent contact with the mirror of Q's dressing-table, and left a spidery fracture before falling to the floor. There followed a pencil, a ball of yellow paper, and after these came Q. Rumpled and disheveled, with a phosphorescent eye he came, out through the door and down the stairs like some meteoric example of natural force, across the lobby, and, hatless, hands in pockets, down the hotel steps to the pavement, radiating July sun. There, for an instant, he stood as though the force had momentarily need of direction, and, catching sight of a stray jitney, he made a gracefully desperate gesture — a flinging up of his right arm. It was as though a rope shot out, sang through clear air, and settled itself about the neck of the jitney-driver. He began to jerk and to push with his feet. The motor buzzed, the car backed, and turned and drifted to a stop in front of Q.

Again rapt in space-devouring energy, Q threw himself with tigerish suppleness into the back seat, stretched out his legs, subsided on his spine, seemed to cast down reins upon a pony's neck.

"Go somewhere like hell," he murmured sweetly.

The man, at work again on levers, looked back, smiled with the superior manner of all mechanics, and

took his passenger up Main Street and away with growing speed.

Q sat slightly swayed and shaken by motion, the phosphorescent eyes fixed on space. His lips moved.

“Invert and multiply,” he said softly, “invert and multiply — oh, *damn!*”

Five minutes out of town, he climbed suddenly around to the front seat and sat down beside the driver.

“Distract my mind from its sufferin’,” he said. “Learn me how to run the car.”

“What’s your trouble?” the scornful professor of speed demanded with a certain sympathy. Nearly human he seemed for an instant, so strong was the pressure of Q’s need.

“My trouble, stranger, is something you outgrew about ten years ago, kind of shed it off with your short pants. Say, I’d like to forget it. I’ll give you all you need for learnin’ me to run this car.”

Q focused his powerful attention on a simultaneous use of foot and hand, eye and common sense — it was a combination of energies to which his life had very excellently trained him; the mechanic condescended to applaud his maiden efforts and they traveled far along white, dusty roads, over which the broad, weary foliage of July drooped lifelessly. Q’s self-respect, badly shaken by Mary’s stern, unexplained — to her, alas! eternally unexplainable — command to “invert and multiply,” gradually revived itself; hope returned, the whole large arc of his ambition renewed itself in his sky. If he could master

the intricacies of this mysterious machine, surely he was man enough to understand Heloise, even if fractions were a trifle more mysterious. This was not his conscious reasoning, but, in the arduous distress of his new existence, just such small encouragements were necessary to his pride, even to his self-respect. Sometimes the sickness of his discouragement weakened the very fibers of his will.

After two hours of mechanical absorption, Q looked less meteoric and very much more cheerful. He allowed the mechanic, now a friend, to recapture the place of control and relaxed beside him with a sigh of accomplishment.

"Let's turn her up toward the mountain here. Can she climb?"

"She sure can!" Proudly the owner of a Ford jitney, so illuminatingly feminine in its temperament, put her through her paces. The crazy engine took the stony lane in bounding jerks, energetic, nervous, excitable, missish, then, becoming matronly, hummed and drew itself with an affectation of steadiness along the graded ascent. It was a made road, but it had been neglected. It led at last to an inn near the summit of the hill — a shabby, dilapidated inn — once painted white and green, now a dingy gray, shadowed by cedar, oak, and mountain ash looking half-blind and deaf and a little sly, perhaps, like some aged gossip that could tell things if it would.

"Say," Q asked, "can a man get a drink in there?"

"Sure can."

"Then let's drop our reins and go in, shall we?"

Maybe we can stop for supper — the sun's gettin' down and we can't make it back before the River Hotel shuts up its biscuit-shootin'."

"All right with me," the mechanic agreed cheerily.

So they came into Folly Inn. It was a quaint place; its square front hall received them into deep dusk — low-ceiled, a wooden staircase leading up to even deeper dusk above, a shadowy counter, chintz-curtained windows, an array of copper and brass and old pewter — a fireplace — evidently an inn that had seen better days. The keeper came out from a corner somewhere to do what he could to get them up a supper. "The old big dining-room was closed for lack of custom, but there was li'le supper room — more cheerful — that parties sometimes reserved." It was empty to-night — he made a "specialty of fried chicken and waffles and all fresh vegetables and fruit in season." He was a small, dark, wrinkled, peering man, who slipped about furniture with uncanny sidling swiftness like a crab. He led them to a small washroom from which Q first emerged. Over in a far corner of the large dim room his keen, curious eyes had noticed a stooping, bundled figure in an arm-chair, a figure that was incessantly engaged in tiny, restless movements and whisperings. "My old grandfather," said the man; "near a hundred he is and a little out of his wits — nobody listens to him — he talks to hisself like that all day and half the night. I get him up like a bundle mornings, and set him down in the chair and there he sets and chatters to hisself until I pick him up and put him to bed — It's

near his bedtime now.” Q strolled over to the “bundle” and received a surprisingly intelligent look from eyes embedded in myriad wrinkles, so deep and numerous that the features were lost entirely, all but these little searching eyes. The chatter, punctuated by a queer, grieving, half-chanted “um-hum,” went on without interruption, not stopping even though the chatterer acknowledged Q’s presence by a nodding of its head.

“— fat little whiskery fellow *he* was — um-hum — wore rings and rode horseback — um-um — and did n’t care what he rode — seen him many’s the time a gallopin’ down the road fit to break his hunter’s legs — and they tell me how on a wager he rode through the river tunnel to race the express and just missed bein’ caught — that was afore he lost his second wife — used to bring the dressmaker woman here long afore he got his freedom to marry her — his third wife — funny how a little whiskery feller like him could git three fine young women to tie up to him — those days we’d have some queer parties at the inn — ”

“It must have been a regular round-up them days,” said Q, and the old man was so delighted that he straightened up and smacked with his toothless lips, his eyes brightening intensely in their folds.

“Ah, sir, you say so! Many the stories I could tell, but who’s to listen? — I set here and tell ’em over to myself — nobody cares now, nobody cares now. All the old life of Sluypenkill dead and gone — um-um — motors carry folks away to the cities — no parties up

here now — except once in a hundred months when we get something vulgar — but I can remember things — about the old families. There was skeletons that went stalking about our rooms. All ghosts now, sir. You look like a gentleman yourself, but you have n't got the twist of the tongue — You favor old Mr. DeLancey — he was a fine young chap and his sister, Miss Susan, pretty and sweet, pretty and sweet, and her father would n't see her again, not after her marriage — Oh, they cared for their names, those days. Um-hum. Other fathers might have had reason to —”

“Don't let yourself be bored by him, sir,” suggested the sidling innkeeper, drawing near and not troubling to lower his voice for the suggestion; “he just runs on about the old days — half of it he makes up himself, I think — I'll have your supper ready in about ten minutes. The other gentleman is waiting for you —”

“I'll be there in a minute —” Q was really about to move away when his attention was arrested by a name which tumbled out of the old man's mouth on a sort of chuckle.

“Dr. Sales — um-hum — that night — I had the neuralgia — O Lordy, what a night — not a wink of sleep for poor me and the rain slidin' down the roof — I could n't bear it, I just felt I had to get the doctor to give me something at half-past two or maybe three it was, and I wrapped my wife's flannel petticoat about my face and lighted a candle to find my way to Dr. Sales — he was good-natured, yes, he was; they

talk about him now, but in those days when he had n't no practice and just come out here and played the piano to my daughters and sang — well, he was good-natured and that's all I ask — um-hum — you don't get folks to listen to an old man now — but I was n't so old then, to be sure — If it had n't been for the neuralgia, though, I'd never have seen the poor frightened thing come creeping along with her letter and slipping it under Dr. Sales's door — she not undressed at that time of the morning — a Grinscoombe, if you please, crying along the hall and shaking and looking about her like a scared rabbit — me hiding against the corner there upstairs — I thought it was something queer when she came in with Mr. Thayer — not the present one, you know — very handsome gentleman, very, beautiful big eyes — slow-spoken — always spoke low to the ladies and kept looking into their eyes — many a time I've seen him — but she kept herself wrapped up in a veil and would n't come down to supper — he looking as fierce as a panther — and I kept wondering what he was up to with a tall, slim, dark-haired young woman when I knew his wife — she was a Van Dusen — was a tiny blonde, but I never would have thought Miss Selda Grinscoombe, if it had n't been for my neuralgia and catching her creeping along the hall with a letter to slip under Dr. Sales's door — yes, sir, he helped her to get away that night back to her father and I never told what I saw — um-hum — innkeepers and priests — innkeepers and priests: But now nobody will listen to me mumbling and whispering on account of my teeth, and some-

how you remind me of the young gentlemen that used to be here with their laughin' and their drinkin' and the wrong kind of women and the right kind of women, thinking, poor little dears, that they was doing something kind of bold and gay — like Miss Susan with her livery-stable boy or little Mrs. Van Dusen and her husband and her husband's cousin from Boston —”

Here Q moved away.

He felt guilty and bemused. He wondered if the old, old fellow had really seen anything so strange as Miss Selda Grinscoombe creeping along the upper hall of this inn at three o'clock of a rainy night so long ago — creeping and shaking and crying with a letter in her hand — It probably was n't his Miss Selda — Q had a swift recurrent mind picture of her cold face, and with it a more vivid impression of that secret waver, that controlled uncertainty that hid itself beneath the stone and iron of her look. It was not fair to the woman's pride that he should have stumbled upon any such piteous upheaval of her youth. Perhaps — Q ate his chicken and waffles silently, throwing out a humorous observation now and then to keep his comrade entertained — perhaps the hospital at the Mills had suffered from mismanagement, perhaps Dr. Sales's ignorance had been allowed disastrous protection because of Miss Grinscoombe's control of the Mills, of the hospital, of all Sluypenkill. Q's patient investigation, dictated by the tireless wolfishness of his instantaneous hatred of William Sales, had brought him again and again face to face

with the revelation that Sluypenkill lay in the hollow of this gray-faced woman's narrow hands. A man under her protection could afford laziness, could afford selfishness, could afford his pet vices. But it was n't exactly fair to adopt this information — and the old man was scarcely to be trusted — had n't his son accused him of making up tales for his own amusement? Suddenly Q, thinking of the "old lady" and her "poor boy," laughed softly and maliciously over his coffee-cup.

"What you got now?" demanded the mechanic, ready for anything.

"I got queer tracks — looks like a old lady's walking backward down a hill," he said. "What's the ammunition for that — kind of game — toast and tea —? Or fried lady-fingers?"

"The whiskey you've taken ought n't have done that to you," said the mechanic. "You Western fellows don't hold your drink."

CHAPTER XI

LAYER CAKE

"I HAVE my faults," said Mrs. Stopper, stroking down the brown-and-white foulard over her prominent bust, upon which she habitually seemed to suspect the persistence of a breakfast crumb; "nobody knows that better than myself, but I am not a gossip. I can't abide gossip. Indeed, I said to Mrs. Eggles only yesterday when we were discussing the dreadful trouble that has come upon poor Mrs. Huggs like a judgment from Heaven, every one having expected a catastrophe since she was blind long enough to cultivate the acquaintance of the Johnson woman, knowing as she must have known that butter on a hot day is no softer than that husband of hers, and I've always said that if a woman can't keep her husband she deserves to lose him; meat is too strong food for a weak stomach and a wife should temper the wind to a shorn lamb!"

"Yes, ma'am," said Q. T. Kinwydden.

He was a figure of discretion, seated in Mrs. Stopper's parlor, sipping Mrs. Stopper's tea. The room was arranged for a card party which preceded a reading from Sir Walter Scott, Mrs. Stopper being chairman of a Scott Club. The members were due at four-thirty and it was now four o'clock. Q, having found wandering and returned a yellow cat, named Sweetie, very dear to Mrs. Stopper's heart, was being rewarded by refreshments and moral observations.

"Yes, ma'am," he said.

"So I said to her, 'Gossip is one of the seven deadly sins' — not that I meant to be irreverent, you understand, Mr. Kinwydden, because I was quite in earnest, and Mrs. Huggs was the first to cast a stone when Charles B. Starraway's daughter — the dry-goods store on the corner, you know, and such a nice man, though he does n't quite belong, but he has such a nice Van Dyke beard, which gives elegance, I always think, to a man's appearance, no matter what his figure — she left for the movies and was seen with practically nothing on, in a production entitled 'He Killed the Thing He Loved,' and her poor mother being in the audience and not prepared for seeing Susy like that, in public, fainted dead away — and how is your wrist now, Mr. Kinwydden? — out of the sling, I see."

"Just fine, thank you."

"Dr. Sales sewed it up for you, I suppose. Well, he's very good, I dare say, and a pleasant-spoken gentleman enough, and the best people call him in, and I know that Miss Grinscoombe won't have any other medical man, not if she was on her death-bed, but I can't help it, I did like Dr. Ellison. It seemed like he did more for my indigestion than Dr. Sales. And I never could believe what they told of him and the poor young man having to leave Sluypenkill because of it and he in love with dear Mary Grinscoombe, though I don't think she'd have had him, though you never can tell, and Miss Grinscoombe not countenancing him on the hospital staff and driving

around in person to his patients, breaking up his practice with her own hands, you might say! Loyalty to your friends is one thing and Dr. Sales has been her friend, no doubt — they do say there was a time when, had n't it been for the pride of old Mr. Grinscoombe, which — even when you consider all he had to be proud of, and I hope it's far from me not to admit a just superiority — was something sinful — now, where was I, Mr. Kinwydden?”

“I'm afraid, ma'am, I'm off the trail. You was speakin' about doc's bein' a friend to Miss Grinscoombe, was n't you?”

“I presume likely. Had n't it been for Mr. Grinscoombe's pride, doctor might have been more to Miss Selda than a friend. He looked high in his love for a widower, and, when he first came, a practitioner in a very small way, for it was n't until the Manor took him up that his practice began to amount to anything — and I hear now that it ain't safe for him to go among the mill-hands — all of which is something before my day; I was about eighteen when doctor first came to the place with his little boy and, anyway, whatever his own ambitions may have been, and we can't be sure, for the secrets of his heart are unknown, we are all purfickly sure he wanted Laurie to match off with Miss Heloise — that was purfickly apparent to every layer of Sluypenkill society. And Laurie and Miss Heloise were a pretty pair of friends, too, and quite intimate. Sluypenkill society *is* like a layer cake, don't you think, Mr. Kinwydden? As Mary herself says — her name for it, my dear — ‘*Grinscoombery*’ on top —”

Q was moved to laughter. "That's a mighty fittin' word for it, Mrs. Stopper. 'Grinscoombery' — it's something I've been seekin' for — 'Grinscoombery.'"

Mrs. Stopper's little round face of a gossip shone with pleasure.

"Grinscoombery's the icing," she went on, moved by applause to an elaboration of her figure, "and then comes we townspeople, good solid cake, and below us is a little fillin' in the shape of newcomers not sufficiently recognized, then some more solid stuff, small shopkeepers and what not, so on down to the factory and domestic classes — and they do say that the factory —"

"It's sure mixin' to me," Q admitted, "keeps me millin' 'round."

"Yes," chuckled Mrs. Stopper, "but you've come along with a knife and cut a slice clean through from icing to plate. Why, you've got friends clear down to the little yellow curs that hang around the saloon on the corner. I saw you one afternoon, taking one of the hotel waitresses — Sophie — to a movie matinée! I call that democracy. But it won't do you any good at the Manor, young man, take my word for that. They won't understand it — not Miss Grinscoombe — at all. You can't go ridin' with Miss Heloise one day and calling on me the next and taking a waitress to the movies on the third, and keep your social footin' in Sluypenkill."

"When are you agoin' to show me the door, ma'am?" asked Q, standing up and smiling at his hostess.

"Well, you look out! What Grinscoombe Manor says, *goes*. We townspeople don't run against Miss Grinscoombe's decision, generally speaking."

"You got me plumb scairt, ma'am!"

"Yes — you'd better be! And how goes the education?"

"Still uphill and down timber and slide rock —"

"Oh, must you be going now?"

"I reckon I must." Q's eyes twinkled. "I got a date with Sophie."

Mrs. Stopper's face showed genuine concern. She came close to her tall visitor and put a plump hand on his arm. "Now, Mr. Kinwydden, please don't be foolish. Eastern ways are n't Western ways, as nobody knows better than myself, having an only daughter married and living in the Dakotas, a wild prairie place where she eats with the hired men, and as far as I can make out, the poor child cooks for them, and brought up delicate, as I took pains to teach her the pianoforte and a real clever hand at bridge she was, too. Sophie has done enough mischief already, as doctor would be the first to tell you. Ah, well! I'll not tell you the story, for I can't give it at first hand and I'm not the one to gossip, but I wish you well, Mr. Kinwydden, as all of us do in Sluypenkill, and thank you kindly for bringin' home Sweetie, he gives me more trouble than a babe — that animal — so roving in his disposition — say, if I dared, I'd christen him — Mr. Huggs!"

And so on, down the hall and out of the door and from the porch until, having passed through the gate,

Q passed out of the range of the plump voice, savoring its own sound on the agile tongue.

Q walked in thought, amused and quizzical. He was revolving one of his aphorisms, "Talkin' makes things happen just as sure as happenings makes folks talk. It's a plumb tangle." He further elucidated to himself: "Seems like lives and feelin's gets tied up together when they live too clost. Folks is like hosses in a crowded corral, they fair trample on each other. When you try to cut one out, if you ain't careful, somebody's likely to get hurted pretty bad."

He went thoughtfully along the little maple-bordered street and turned down Main Street to the hotel, where he passed through a vacant, shaded dining-room, in which the usual intense activity of fly-life was subdued to a dim, hazy murmur, through swinging doors into the pantry. It was a bare, narrow room and at its far end, near the single window, stood Sophie, her hat hanging in her hand, her forehead pressed against the pane. He stood for a minute looking at her, and the expression of his eyes was less guarded than usual, and more masterful. With Sophie, as with few people in this Eastern world, he felt entirely self-assured and dominant. She was, like himself, unlettered, wild and direct. Her beauty was in all its points passionate and primitive — the wild and startled eyes, the quick, soft motions of her lips, her changeful color, the way she held her ripe and supple body. Bone by bone she was one of the women he knew. She was ready for the flight that begs pursuit, the fiery struggle that demands capture. She was

ignorant, lowly, unhappy, rebellious. His nerves seemed to rest in the relaxation of a certain limited but fundamental congeniality.

"Hullo," said Q. "Ain't you ready for that sody-water yet?"

She turned about, ducked her head, put on her hat, and moved, the brim low over face, in silence toward him.

He bent to look closely at her and straightened. "Say, you Sophie gel, what's wrong? You been cryin' your eyes out!"

At that she stood still, put her hands over her face, and sobbed childishly.

"It — it is n't anything I can tell you about, sir."

"Quit callin' me 'sir.' I've spoken to you about that quite a lot now. You, gel, who's been treatin' you bad? I'll get him, savvy? Come along to the sody-place and we'll mosy back into the ice-cream parlor and get a table to ourselves. You're plumb wore out dish-wrangling."

In the ice-cream parlor they found a fan-stirred emptiness. He leaned across the little table and touched her hand. She lifted her startled eyes, the eyes of a wild bird, brilliantly black and darting.

"Q," she wailed softly, "it's been going on so long. I'm all wore out with it."

"Is that so?" It was so sympathetic a murmur, and his eyes fixed upon her were so compelling in his thin and handsome face, that her sorrow began to tumble out of her.

"I can't abide the man," she said, "but Poppa and

he are always aftern me an' I'm that tired and heart-sick that I'm about ready to give in. If he could have had me the wrong way, he'd have left off plaguing me long ago. For half a season here I had to lock my door against him night after night, and I think it's a shame — that I do — for Poppa to stand by and encourage him now to get me for his wife, Poppa knowing what I suffered from him before his own wife died."

"Why, the old coyote," said Q, his mind conjuring up the pimpled and perspiring face of the head waiter whom he knew to be the father of Sophie.

"And he is an important gentleman and has means, and if he sells out, he'll be downright wealthy, so Poppa thinks it's a fine match for me, and I suppose it is."

"Say, don't you tie up to any feller less'n a Congressman, Sophie, don't you. Let your Pa rear. He can't hurt you — a little fat feller like him!"

Sophie unwillingly smiled. "I'm real afraid of Poppa," she said, "and when *he* sells out —"

"What's *he* agoin' to sell out of, anyways?"

"Why, the hotel!"

"You don't say! Why, the gol-derned old son of — the gol-derned old fool! You don't mean to tell me that Benton, the feller that looks like a long drink of warm milk, is plottin' to make you his bride! — Miss Mariana's Pa? Say, ain't he the lively old outlaw! Who's agoin' to buy him out?"

"I don't know. He's had a bid from some New York party, through his agent, some man named Goldman, I think — at least that's the agent's name — I'm not sure."

“Some feller really wants to own the River Hotel! Well, is that the truth! The world is sure full of quaint fancies. Sell out his little old hotel and marry you — I’d never hev guessed it from lookin’ at him and settlin’ up his charges. Does Bill go with the buzz-box?”

Sophie was back in the cloud of her trouble and would no longer smile.

“I’ve always held myself high,” she said, “I have that. And never kept company with any of the town boys, not even carried on with the drummers, and you know they’re forever ogling and lovemaking. I — I’ve always kind of hoped — ” she stopped with a wavering break in her voice.

“Sure,” said Q. “Sure, you’ve hoped for a regular feller.”

“Yes — and when you’ve known one!” Beneath the lowered inky lashes, her cheeks burned and quivered; her ripe lips were pulled straight by pain.

“You can’t quit thinkin’ of him — I reckon that’s the truth, gel.”

“And the more I try to make myself good enough for him,” the girl went on, moving with a beautiful difficulty her pain-stretched lips, “studying and reading and practicing my writing so’s he won’t be ashamed of my letters — ”

Poor Q was smitten by a likeness and the color rose slowly to his face.

“ — Why, the more I can’t abide the other fellows that I could get for the smiling at them. There’s no use in talking to Poppa about Laurie, for he goes

right up in the air and, anyway, I promised Dr. Sales — ”

“Dr. Sales?”

“Yes, sir. Laurie is Dr. Sales’s son. Oh, it happened once when Dr. Sales closed his house for the summer and he sent Laurie to stop at the hotel for his vacation. That’s when it started. There never was such a sweet kid, honest, Mr. Q, as that Laurie!” Her face melted to the loveliness of memory. “Say, that summer seems a hundred years ago. The good times we had! I just laughed at Mr. Benton those days, even though I had to lock my door to him. And gee! he was fierce with jealousy. Afterwards, though, in the fall, when Dr. Sales came home, it was awful! I’ll never forget it. Dr. Sales came back and found out about Laurie and me. You can’t blame him for taking on about it, because he wanted Laurie to harness up to Miss Heloise Grinscombe — think of that! — and then to find him clean out of his head over me — well, naturally it was hard and put him back a whole lot. I was kind of sorry for him, myself, and I guess he was fond of Laurie like Laurie was fond of him. But, after he got his way with Laurie, I could n’t feel for him; he just worried the soul out of the boy and sent him away, and — and —” the darting, startled eyes widened and fixed. There was a long silence.

“But he writes to you, ma’am?”

She nodded. “Sometimes, yes. But not for a long time now. And his letters have gotten different, kind of — colder like — I guess” — the torturing thought

worked out of her as a splinter works from a wound — "I guess, by now, he's got another girl."

"Where is this Laurie boy?" asked Q.

"In a place called West Lemmon, not so far away. He's started in practice there and I guess he's doing fine. He is awfully smart and taking and a good-looker."

"What he needs," muttered Q, "is one of them long stiff bones that goes down the middle of the back."

"No," Sophie sighed, "he needs — just — to see me. But I promised —"

Her voice trailed off into a silence which lasted them through the eating of their ice-cream and a sober walk back to the hotel.

Sophie returned to the work and the bother of her daily life, with its thundery, threatening shadows, and Q betook himself to a large leather chair in a corner of the lobby, where he smoked a vast number of cigarettes and stared at Mr. Benton behind the wires of his little cage until that gentleman became so nervously self-conscious that he was stricken with an incessant tickling of the throat.

CHAPTER XII

NEW WINE IN OLD BOTTLES

"BEFORE we begin on lessons," said Q, "I've got to ask you to help me out with a letter I've wrote."

His "schoolma'am" shook her head at him. "'I've wrote!' Q?"

Q gazed at her with the intent eyes of a searcher of dictionary pages and at last produced the participle.

"I've written, ma'am. Don't it sound dressy that-away!"

She sighed and held out her hand across the table, and he, standing opposite, fingered his paper for an instant before relinquishing it. "Why did you sigh, then, Miss Mary?" he asked her.

"Because, Q, I don't think you try very hard to speak good English, and that is really the most important part of all your education."

"Yes, ma'am, I know it is, but it's got to come gradual, else I'll be talkin' like a kind of parrot in a high hat — I hev thought about that quite a lot, and it kind of seemed to me that until I had got the sound of talkin' right in my head, it would be akkard like for me to try to talk any different than I was raised to talk."

"You certainly think straight, Q — no matter how you talk! I believe you're right! Let me see your letter."

She brightened as she read it, for, however rebel-

lions his tongue, his pen had been surprisingly well mastered. The sheet was covered with even lines of a clear, strong writing, and even the spelling was no disgrace to her.

DEAR SIR,

I have heard from a friend of your skill as a doc and I'd like it if you'd look after a wound that has been troubling me some lately. It don't seem to heal right and I need the use of my wrist. I am at the River Hotel and will pay you for coming to give me a look-over. Thursday would suit me fine at about three o'clock in the afternoon if you can make it. Kindly telephone me before nine in the morning if I would expect you.

Q. T. KINWYDDEN

Mary, puzzled, looked up with her arch and wistful eyes.

"But, Q — does your wrist still bother you? I thought it was quite well."

"I hev decided to give it a set-back," he answered gravely.

"What do you mean? If there's really something wrong — why not call in Dr. Sales? Why have you this prejudice against him? I've known him all my life — nearly — and he has been the best and kindest friend to me. Who is this other doctor and where did you hear of him?"

Q was folding his letter and through the intense gravity of his face a little flea of some different expression skipped in and out.

"You're up to some sort of deviltry," said Mary.

"Ain't it about time?" he demanded.

"Where is your envelope? Are you going to address it?"

"My," said Q impersonally, "ain't cows and women inquirin' critters! I've seed half a herd move acrost a plain to look in at a hat some lady dude let fall along a trail."

"Don't be nasty. I don't care in the least about your doctor, but it hurts my feelings that you don't trust Dr. Sales. You were dreadfully rude to him about the hospital the day you were hurt. You must not be ready to believe spiteful gossip. I know that there has been a great deal of talk against Dr. Sales — even that a lawsuit was brought against him — Miss Grinscoombe had her lawyer from New York and Dr. Sales was completely exonerated."

"Yes, ma'am. How do you spell *Laurie*?"

Mary started and her face changed from mildly amused annoyance into the most concerned interest.

"L-a-u-r-i-e," she spelled, and watched him with an anxious look.

Dr. Laurie Sales,
West Lemmon,
N.J.

wrote the careful pen in the strong lean fingers.

"Oh, Q! You don't — you can't know what you're doing."

He took out a stamp, put it in place, and slipped the letter into his pocket.

"Now, I'm all ready for lessons, ma'am."

But her face was not ready for schoolma'am impersonalities; it was all one flushed question.

"Q, Q, what are you up to? But it is n't like you to mix up in things — to — to meddle."

"I'm beginning to think that I'm a regular old maid," said Q. "It's town life that does it, and hearin' so much talk from women-folks."

"You are sending for Laurie Sales!" cried Mary breathlessly; "and somehow you know that the River Hotel is just the most fatal spot in the world for Laurie. Look out, Q! You don't want to break his father's heart!"

"I'd not be carin'," he announced briefly.

"You're an unreasonable savage!"

Then with sternness she leaned over, pointing her finger at him, "You must listen to me, Q, and you must follow my advice. I know what I'm talking about. There are excellent reasons why Laurie should not be brought to the River Hotel on any pretext whatever."

"No, ma'am. There is just one reason why he should be brought there — and that's — Sophie!"

"Ah! So you do know!"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Q, you are a silly sentimentalist!"

"Well, ma'am, that sounds like bad talk, but you don't scare me any!"

"Because a pretty little waitress — "

"She tops you by about two heads — that Sophie gel."

Mary flushed. "I — I — you make me feel that I've been insufferably condescending."

"I never use rough talk to a lady. Likely you

called her 'little' because you have forgot what a big classy woman she is."

"Sophie must be trying to get hold of Laurie, and she's using you to decoy him to the hotel."

"No, ma'am, that ain't the truth, but even if it was, why should n't the gel try to keep a holt on the feller she loves?"

"But, Q — Oh, you are a sentimentalist."

"That's twict you've spurred me in the same place."

"You must realize that Sophie is not the wife for Laurie Sales. He is a gentleman, well-born, well-bred, well-educated. She is a servant-girl, uneducated, socially his inferior. I know she is a beauty and probably a very nice girl and would make some nice man happy, but — "

"Ain't Laurie a nice man?" asked Q.

In her excitement, her half-mechanical delivery of one of the dogmas of her father's class, Mary did not notice that the strained look had fallen about Q's lips.

"Yes, yes. He's a charming boy, clever, good-looking, bound to succeed, to go very far. He has shown great good sense and courage. He has made a splendid start. It would be wicked, cruel, to drag him back to the wretchedness of that affair. It almost broke his father's heart!"

"And what about the Sophie gel's heart, ma'am?"

Mary got up and walked about the room.

"I am sorry for her. And I do blame Laurie. But she is young. And she must see, herself, that a mar-

riage between her and Laurie would mean unhappiness for both of them. Three years ago, she acted splendidly."

"But, Miss Grinscoombe, and you must please excuse me — but I am plumb confused — did n't your Pa marry a girl — "

Mary's face flamed and her eyes filled. "Yes," she said shortly, "he did." She stood for a minute stock-still in the middle of the little room staring at Q through the quick, angry tears. "And — in a sense — it ruined his life — but it was a matter of his honor. Mother was a very wonderful woman — and — and — oh, Q, how could you bring that up?" She turned away and stood at one of the windows, her hands clenched at her sides.

"I'm ashamed of myself clear through, Miss Mary, but I sure don't savvy. It seems to me a man ain't worth his grub-stake if he can't choose his woman for himself and stick by his choice. And, ma'am" — something in his voice made her turn quickly to look at him — "you told me once, yourself, that edication and such things had n't ought to count, that lovin' was a man and woman matter."

There followed a stricken sort of silence. Mary stood with her back to the window and her eyes on the floor. Her hands were twisting together behind her back. Her heart seemed to be suffering a punishment of muffled blows.

"So you don't want me to send that letter to Dr. Laurie," Q said in his soft, even voice. "You don't want me to give Sophie her chanct for happiness.

Likely you don't know what the gel's been goin' through. It would take a heap of lovin' to make up to her what she has been put through since her Laurie feller quit."

"But, Q," Mary faltered, making a profile of herself against the sunny window so that the fire of August shone about her curls, "there might be great danger to her in bringing Laurie back. He is several years older now, he is a man, and he will be harder and perhaps less chivalrous. Maybe he still has this feeling for her — I don't know — but I do know he has a profession and a practice and he is ambitious in a place particularly sensitive to birth — is n't that a pretty dangerous combination for Sophie?"

"I can see the truth of that," Q admitted, "but if this feller is as no-account as all that comes to, then Sophie will turn against him pronto. She has some horse-sense and likely it would cure her if he tried any triffin' of that nature. Sophie holds herself high."

"And you are willing to take this responsibility on your shoulders? Of bringing these two people together?"

"You don't know what the gel is up against."

Mary came back slowly to her chair and rested her hand on its back. All the color of excitement and anger had faded from her face, which wore its look of a brave, ill-treated child.

"It would be better for all of us here, I think," she said softly, shaking her head in a half-piteous fashion, "if you took yourself back to your West, Q. We

are not strong enough — we old vessels — for your new wine. We can't think singly or feel straight. There are too many entanglements, things come in thicknesses — " she sighed. "I'm afraid I'm not very clear — shall we do some work? It's nearly twelve o'clock."

"What about my letter?" he demanded.

She shrugged. "I wash my hands of it. I've said everything I can to dissuade you from sending it. I shall be sorry if you do anything to hurt Dr. Sales or Sophie or Laurie. But you are very sure of yourself, it seems."

He gave her a queer quick glance and dropped his eyes.

"I ain't anything like that," he said. He was profoundly hurt.

Lessons began in grim, unsmiling earnest and ended in no lighter fashion. For the first time, Mary's scholar went away without comfort and left her without cheer.

On his way to the hotel, Q mailed the letter, but when the white envelope had dropped out of his sight, he felt heavy of heart and burdened of conscience.

"I'm hittin' a dangerous trail," he confessed to himself. "I'm likely to strike quicksand at this fordin'."

Perhaps it was the sense of guilty defiance that gave him that afternoon a mood of recklessness. He had the glittering eye and tight smile of a dare-devil when at four o'clock of the afternoon he presented

himself by appointment in the gilded South Parlor at the Manor. At first glance Heloise recognized that he was not to be trifled with and the queer waver that his stronger moods inspired began at once to trouble her. Q was aware, but, instead of softening his humor, the awareness seemed to flick it. This was their first meeting since the night she had left him to go out into the moon-magic with Ferdy Fadden. They were both conscious of that episode; Lelo guiltily, he resentfully.

"I hev brought a nag that goes like she wanted to get there first," said Q, "and the poor dern fool is tied up to a machine they called at the stables a dog-cart. It looks like a real death-trap, but I reckon we can make it. Want to come?"

"You're going to take me for a drive, Q? How deliciously absurd! Buggy-riding! Come on, I'm ready for anything."

"To-day, to-morrow, and yesterday."

"Why not? It's better to be ready for living, is n't it? than to be behind the game. I like people with pep, don't you?"

"Yes, ma'am, that's why I chose this here lady-hoss." His eyes narrowed at her as she climbed in, he standing below with the reins in his hands. "What are you all duded up for this afternoon?"

She was in fact beautifully gowned in pale green with a wide hat under which her clear, cool beauty wore a nymph-like purity.

"To fascinate you, of course!"

He smiled. "You think I'm a plumb tenderfoot on this sort of trail, don't you?"

He climbed in and the “lady-hoss” started down the long straight drive with a bony, long-stepping vim that threw Heloise back against the seat-strap and evoked a small excited laugh.

“Very well — if you want the whole truth — I was planning, after I had completely demolished you, to get what was left of you to leave me at the Country Club where I am to have tea with another victim.”

“Mr. Fer-dee-nand Fadden,” drawled Q.

“Don’t you think he’s a charming victim? I do.”

Q guided his mare around the gatepost and headed her north.

“She’s got a concrete mouth,” he muttered, “and gutta-percha legs and her back is made of elastic and she has a hard, hard heart”; then with hardly a change of tone, he asked, “Ain’t he a married man, Heloise?”

To this informality of nomenclature, she had at last persuaded him.

“Yes. What has that to do with it? How proper is our Q! You have a lot to learn yet, my dear innocent, Western friend! Is n’t Mrs. Fayre a married woman, and don’t tell me you have n’t noticed her marked attentions to you!”

Q’s face flamed. “She’s agoin’ to get the lesson of her life, that lady, if she don’t quit temptin’ me.”

At which naïvely shocking statement Heloise laughed until the dog-cart jerked her music to silence.

“This is a perfectly awful form of discipline — this dog-cart of yours, Q! — What will you do to poor Mrs. Fayre if she keeps on ‘tempting’ you? — You’re too dreadful.”

"Well, ma'am, seems like she entertains the notion that a man is a safe little pet animal, like some kind of lapdog. Now I ain't anything like that. I'm not a quarter so safe. I'm a real man-critter and likely as not some day I'll hug her."

Heloise laughed again. "You've never hugged me!" she said.

He turned upon her so white and shocked a face that she drew back from him.

"Q, I'm sorry. Don't please look at me like that. Don't be so angry. What did I say? I did n't mean anything. I was just — well, teasing you."

He turned away his eyes. "I reckon I *have* got a whole lot to learn," he said presently between his teeth, "but you've got some to learn yet, girl, and I'd sure hate for you to get your learnin' from Fadden — him or any other married man of his kind. I know more'n you think. I've seed a heap of ugly things, likely I hev done some ugly things. There's just two ends to that married game — one way you come out a knave, and the other way you come out a fool. If you're a woman, you don't come out quite *clean*."

Heloise burned — face, neck, and brow — burned with pure anger. The insult of the phrase as one even remotely to be applied to her was a whip to her superiority. She bit at her slender pink lip and drew in her breath.

"One must amuse one's self," she said with an affectation that made the bite of her words doubly keen to the listener, "in this impossible place. One must

have some excitement. One must occasionally have the society of a man of the world, or one gets out of practice — forgets how to behave."

He laughed. "You want excitement. Well, ma'am, so do I. There ain't enough danger in this place for 'one,' I figure it. Danger is what 'one's' out lookin' for."

Before she knew even that he had moved, he was out along the shaft. He flung up his arms with a wild long cry — he did something, she could n't see what. The mare flung herself back, snorted, and gathered her long bones together. Q was back in his seat, the reins wrapped about his wrist, his body braced. He looked at Heloise, his mask thrown down, his face gleaming, young, reckless, hard — like the faces of men in far wild places. Heloise clung to the seat; her hat was gone already, her hair streamed, they rocked along the road at a speed that took her breath. It seemed to her that the cart must fly to pieces; they raked down a hill, flew on one wheel about a turn, flashed by a motor full of white and startled faces which drew from Lelo half an hysterical laugh, they swerved from a bridge, bolted down a bank, incredibly steep, splashed through a deep ford. In front was a ledge that seemed to overhang.

"By God!" said Q. "She means to make it!"

She went at it like a lunatic, doubled herself, jumped, caught at the earth with her feet. For a perilous moment they hung, then heaved and plunged up to the roadside. The mare stopped and stood shaking all over, in a lather of foam.

"Feelin' better now, ain't 'one'?" demanded Q, looking at his companion.

She too was shaking from head to foot and white and wild.

"You were trying to kill me!" she panted, when she could get her voice. "Take me home. I'll never forgive you."

"I thought you wanted some excitement. Playin' with death is a heap healthier and honester than some other ways of gettin' it."

He turned the mare and then regained the road and began to trot soberly toward home. Heloise, with shaking hands, arranged her hair. "I always trusted you," she began, when she fancied she had it in order — it was really a one-sided tangle of ruffled gold and she had a quite distracted and unaccustomed look — "but, as a guide, you are quite as untrained as you are as a man of the world. I don't care for savagery, or foolhardiness. I suppose you were angry with me and wanted to give me a fright. You succeeded perfectly. But I have lost most of my respect for you. I knew that you lacked certain qualities of finish and polish, things that come by birth and training, but I did think that you had a fundamental manliness and chivalry —"

"Your color is comin' back," said Q, "but chiefly to your nose. Ain't that comical?"

She was silent, but the color suffused itself more becomingly.

"Are you wantin' to meet Mr. Fer-dee-nand at the Club?"

“I told you I wanted to go home,” she snapped, her temper running wild.

“Oh, I forgot your orders. You ain’t lookin’ quite in Fer-dee-nand’s class just at present, but by the time you’re all curried up and brushed down again it’ll be too late for the Club, won’t it? Say, there’s your hat on a bush alongside the road — and I see two cows leanin’ ag’in’ a fence elbowin’ each other to make out what in thunder the thing is. I wisht Miss Mary could see that! If you’ll hold the reins I’ll collect it for you.”

She held the reins and he was out and in again with his lithe, linked movements. They drove for a while in silence. The shadows were lengthening and the katydids were at a frenzy of debate. When Q next spoke he was sober enough.

“I was a plumb fool to put you into danger,” he said, “but I am often took that way with foolishness after I hev had to be extry responsible for long spells. You are right in all you hev told me and I’ll be swearin’ likely half the night over some of them cuts you have given me. Maybe I deserved them, but this ain’t no pleasurin’ for me, this summer, lady, and you sure had ought to be more careful sometimes.” There had begun to be a shake in his voice, and it affected her oddly, with shame and fear and pain. “You hev got the whip hand over me and you don’t often spare to use it. Was n’t it for the times when you act like a real live woman, when you look at me like you uset to out there in the big places — I’d hev quit you quite a long time back. But you keep me hopin’ — and, by God! that’s what hurts most.”

He looked at her and she was perhaps unreasonably startled to see that there were tears in his cool and brilliant eyes. She found herself wondering if ever before they had suffered the shame of that stinging moisture. For an instant she almost understood.

She touched his arm with a quick finger, then bent her face to both her hands.

"I am bad, Q, bad, cruel, wicked, selfish. Go away from me; because I've been hurt myself, I'll hurt you. Go away."

He gave her no answer and, after a few minutes, she pulled herself together and put on her hat. The silence, white and hard on his part, white and soft on hers, held them to the Manor steps. She slowly mounted them, he standing at the foot. She crossed the veranda and went as far as the door. There was a sound of voices in the house. She hung there an instant, then suddenly came running back to Q. Her face was the face of a frightened child, large-eyed, intent. She stood close to him and caught his arm in both hands, shaking it.

"Don't you go away! Don't you leave me! Q! I need you dreadfully, most dreadfully!" She pressed her fingers tight and fled, this time into the house and up the stairs.

CHAPTER XIII

A GAME OF CHESS

THERE is no life so selfish and indolent that it has not woven into itself some strands of real emotion. In the life of Dr. Sales, that amiable drifter before the winds of opportunity, there were two such fibrous webs. One held him, against much strain, to his son, Laurie, and the other led him by a short-cut down the hill and through a tiny shabby copse of beech and maple trees, carved by the initials of school-children and town lovers, across a rubbish-littered field to the back door of Mary Grinscoombe's home. He liked to come in through the kitchen garden and surprise Mary at her work. He was preëminently, like all indolent people, a man of habits. He had formed the habit of playing for an hour or two with Mary when that outcast descendant of Grinscoombery was an arch and mirthful little girl. Mary's gurgling fits of laughter, crinkled eyes, and fat doubled body had a distinct fascination. Dr. Sales, when not responsible for them, was fond of children, and children almost invariably like large, selfish, easy-going people. He thought of Mary still, he would have told you, as a child. Her fascination of soft and very gleeful laughter and of crinkled eyes had outlived the doubling-up of an outgrown plumpness, and to them had been added a rather pitiful charm of courage and sensitive gratitude. Mary mothered Dr. Sales — her heart was

huge in this capacity — she did his mending for him and she played him at chess, the most strenuous mental habit of his life. Sluypenkill on the tongue of Mrs. Stopper credited Dr. Sales with a disappointed passion for Miss Selda; it credited him with an ambitious desire for a match between his son and Heloise; it had never credited him with a devotion for little Mary Grinscoombe and with an acid-eating jealousy concerning her affections. Both were true. He had bitterly hated the young Dr. Ellison who had courted Mary, and, in spite of the good cause on which were founded his dislike and dread of Q. T. Kinwydden, he did not hate the young Westerner with full bitterness until a certain afternoon when he saw Mary looking up from her pupil's copy-book with an expression in her eyes. Dr. Sales knew those eyes — their waggery and wistfulness; he knew their kindness as he knew their quick warm wrath. He had never seen this expression in them before, and, at sight of it, his heart turned over painfully in his big body. He knew that Mary was no longer his little pet; he understood why he had exerted himself rather carefully in certain quarters for a provision for her future, why he had allowed her to believe him the benefactor of her father and herself when he was really only the purveyor of secret benefaction; he knew why he had so disliked young Ellison, a feeling he had hitherto, in nearly honest moments, put down to professional jealousy, and, above all, he knew why he must drive Q at once and forever out of her life. The man was dangerous. The young man was very dangerous. Fine little beads

of perspiration came out on Dr. Sales's soft, easily moved upper lip.

But not until a fortnight later did his painful pre-occupation move his sluggishness to action, and then, with the good luck that mysteriously enough had always directed his inertia, he chose the day of Mary's first conflict with her pupil. Q had gone off to mail his letter and Mary was angry. Her advice had been ignored and her rebuke had obviously hurt — for both reasons, Mary, the obstinate and tender-hearted, was enraged. Besides, she had suffered a self-revelation. For twenty-four years Mary had scorned Grinscoomberry; she had discovered during her talk with Q that of this pride she was an integral part; that amongst all its descendants, Grinscoomberry had none with so large a share as herself — pride of culture, pride of caste, pride of race. How else account for her rebellion against the marriage between Laurie and Sophie, "the little waitress"? Q's pounce upon this instinctive diminutive of hers had been shrewd enough. Mary writhed. Pride began its battle in her heart. A man of no education, of no name, of no traditions! She had stood with a muffled heart and with averted eyes, on fire from brow to foot because he, with that strained note in his voice, had repeated to her word for word her own valorous encouragement. "You told me yourself that education had n't ought to count, that lovin' was a man and woman matter —" and, "Oh," poor Mary admitted, "it was. It was." If he had loved her, would she, after all, have allowed her unbridled heart its liberty? Would

she not have stifled it and run away — like Laurie Sales? It was this troubled, proud, and self-tormenting Mary that Dr. Sales found, sitting pale and vacant in her tiny parlor, when he came in for his game of chess — and for another game in which he felt himself a player with a handicap.

He got the board ready for her almost in silence and began an absent pushing about of his pieces which drew up a surprised glance from Mary.

“But, Dr. Sales, what’s the matter with you to-day?”

He moved a pawn forward and took it back. His big hand trembled.

“Mary —” he began, and stopped, all the creamy complacency of his big face crinkled and disturbed. She felt a warning tremor run through her nerves. It was as though a strange light fell into the little room. Its familiarity vanished, the man in front of her changed before her eyes. Comfortable and kindly Dr. Sales, who had kept lemon drops for her in his constricted waistcoat pocket — she remembered a hundred odd and disconnected things while he sat there, dumbly staring after speaking her name.

“Tell me something,” he said at last. “You think of me as an old man, don’t you?”

“Why, no — only as an old friend.”

“Ah — un ancien ami!” he muttered. “It would be easier if our word for such friendships was *amiété*, easier to change it as it ought so often to be changed. I — I’d like you to begin all over again, Mary.”

“Begin what —?” She pushed away the chess-

board and moved back a little from the table. Her face was pale. She was saying to herself — and hating herself for saying it: “Papa and I owe him hundreds of dollars. If it had n’t been for his help —! If it had n’t been for his help —!”

“Begin all over again with me, my dear.” He got up and began moving about the room in his seeking, undecided fashion, stopping sometimes by the mantel, sometimes near her chair, his hands sliding over his pockets, across his big stomach, fingering the big gold chain. He talked gently and fluently, perhaps a trifle bookishly, as people brought up in the Victorian school still talk in moments of emotion.

“I’ve been troubled about you, little Mary, and it’s by troubling that I’ve found out the truth about myself and you. I don’t want you, please, my dear, to say anything at all to me now; I want you, please, my dear, to sit just where you are and as you are and listen to me. And don’t be frightened. I’ve never frightened you in my life and I’m not going to begin now. It’s true I’ve been your friend and your father’s friend —”

“Very, very true,” she gasped, wondering why it was a gasp instead of the quiet little assertion she had intended it to be.

“And I mean, please God, to keep on being your friend.”

Her eyelids trembled with uncertainty. “What has been troubling you about me?” she asked.

“You’ve never been a silly girl, Mary, nor a sentimental girl. You’ve been sober and steady —”

"Like a work-horse," Mary yielded to her tart sense of the ridiculous and twisted her mouth distastefully over his adjective.

"Like a good woman," he said. "I — I've always had confidence in you."

She was coloring. "What have I done — to —?"

"Oh, you have n't lost this confidence, only I feel I ought to warn you, that perhaps you do need a warning —"

"Dr. Sales," she cried out unexpectedly, "it's too late!" — and scarlet engulfed the fine courage of her face like a red fog of shame through which her eyes shone up at him dauntlessly.

Dr. Sales stopped heavily and stood. The tiny clock ticked. A child pelted with tap-tapping feet beneath the window. Slowly Mary bent forward her face and closed her lids, gripping fast with small work-roughened hands the wicker arms of her chair.

"But it's no use, Dr. Sales; he does n't care for me — that way — at all."

"Mary! Are you talking of — of this — Q?"

"Yes."

Dr. Sales seemed to gather voice. "This rough product of cow-camps — illiterate, without an ounce of culture or refinement! But I thought you had good sense." He laughed, his lips shaken.

Mary had lifted her chin; the red fog of her shame had dropped back on her heart, leaving her white and marked with purple under her eyes.

"I ought n't to care," she said, as though to herself. "I've called him most of those things myself."

“And you are telling me that you — love this man? I can’t believe it, Mary!”

“It’s hopelessly and humiliatingly true. Nothing would have dragged it out of me, Dr. Sales, but the dread of what I fancied you were going to say.”

Again he laughed. “Why, this young man will have to be taken seriously. He is more dangerous than I thought. And a cool hand! Any young fellow that strolls in from a cow-camp and juggles with the hearts of three young women at once —”

“Dr. Sales!”

He went on breathlessly, “Miss Heloise Grinscoombe and Miss Mary Grinscoombe and — the waitress at the River Hotel — something of a record, eh?”

Mary stood up. She had drawn her eyelids together and peered at him now as though she had a difficulty with her vision.

“I don’t know you,” she announced slowly, and the strangeness of this remark made him step back. She went over to a little battered desk. “Dr. Sales,” she said, “I have been earning a good deal of money lately. I want to pay back some part of Papa’s great debt to you — and mine.”

While, shakily, she opened an unwilling drawer, while she took out a small bundle of bills, while she counted these, white-lipped, there came from William Sales not a sound. He stood, ponderous, unexpressive, blowing noiselessly in and out his flapping lips. He took the bills from Mary’s hands and she had the courage to look him in the face as he took them.

"So you're paying me off," he said.

"Everything," she cried out in a voice of extreme suffering, "is just utterly unbearable. If it were n't so childish and useless, I'd wish I was dead."

Dr. Sales had put the money down on the table in the center of the chess-board. He seemed calmer now and, taking out a big crumpled white handkerchief, he mopped his forehead and blew his nose.

"This is a very small part of your debt to me, Mary Grinscoombe. How are you going to pay off the rest?"

"I don't know. But it will be paid. How did you expect it to be paid?"

"It seems very strange to me, Mary, for us to be talking like bitter, angry enemies. Does n't it seem at least a little strange to you?"

"I told you — I did n't know you. And I don't. What you said about Heloise and me and Sophie just — tore my whole idea of you to shreds. It was so vulgar and so untrue. I happen to know just how untrue it is. In fact, I meant to give you a warning about Sophie —"

"A warning?" A man whose moral standing is based on machinations is readily alarmed. Dr. Sales now looked almost absurdly out of countenance. He sat down in the wicker chair which had permanently bulged to cradle his proportions.

"But I don't think I'll give it to you, that is, more fully than I've already given it. I feel so uncertain of all my cock-sure opinions to-day. Nothing would surprise me."

"And yet you are so much surprised and so indignant to find out that — I love you, Mary!"

"Oh, please go away!" she broke out tearfully. "Oh — please!"

And without waiting for him to yield to the request or to rebel against it, she went away herself, upstairs to her room with the speed of an escaping dryad.

Dr. Sales left the money on the table and went over to Mary's desk. There he sat down and put his elbows on the flap and pressed his two fat palms to his throbbing temples. After a while he pulled a sheet of paper toward him and began to write. He represented himself to Mary, as we would any of us probably represent ourselves to our desired, as a very noble, self-sacrificing man. He wrote rather well, and if his flowing pen indulged in shaded, flowery capitals, it was the fault of the Victorian training. As he wrote, the smooth calm returned to his face and his small eyes reverted to complacency. Mary and her father were really rather deeply in his debt — by proxy. He did not accentuate this fact in his letter, but it somehow slid in between the lines. Mary had confessed an extremity of folly and humiliation to him — he did not refer to this either, but it was very vividly expressed in what he left out. Mary knew something about Q and Sophie against which Laurie's father should be warned — this again was triumphantly avoided in the letter and triumphantly readable in it. In fact, it was hard to imagine what Dr. Sales put into the letter when he left out everything that he wanted to say. But his whole career had been a triumph of innuendo. The general tenor of his letter was like this:

“My poor darling little Mary:” (much was expressed, of course, by that “poor little,” for Mary must at once on reading it understand how she had made herself so poor and little in the writer’s judgment).

“What an unfortunate, miserable hour we have just spent in contrast to all the many lovely and tender hours we have enjoyed together ever since I picked you up from your first tumble — I feel, my poor dear, that I’ve been picking you up ever since. But I want you to forget all that. I know that when you are calm again you will do me ample justice. You are my dear little friend, you can’t help being that, and just because, extravagantly, I’m asking you for more than this dear friendship, you won’t go back on your loyalty, will you? I said things that have annoyed and offended you. Forgive me — even if you find out that they’re true.

“Mary, you know me probably better than any one else in the world. Have I ever hurt you? Have I ever done you the least unkindness? I’d like now to take you in my arms and comfort your poor heart. Will you let me? Because it will be comforted. It’s such a true, good, loyal heart and so sensible. Don’t you know that?” (For several paragraphs Dr. Sales told Mary pleasant truths about her heart and so got round to telling her some about his own.) “I am a man of very deep feeling, dear Mary, and you’ve hurt me horribly. But I can — oh, so easily, forgive you for that. Only — I am going to stay away until you send for me. I have put your poor little treasure

trove back into its drawer. I know that you won't wound me unbearably by taking it out again in my presence. Don't I love your brave father, too? Please try to remember my friendship for him. The rest of the world has n't been as friendly, has it?"

This is enough to show the sort of letter Dr. Sales wrote to Mary. He left it in her workbox, returned her money to its drawer, and walked slowly away through the kitchen garden. But he did not go back by the short-cut to his house on the hill. He made a circuit and went into the Grinscoombe Circulating Library. In a corner up on the balcony, Henry Grinscoombe's fine white head was outlined against an alcoved window. Dr. Sales climbed ponderously up an iron staircase and puffily approached him. The little man looked up from his world of contemplation and smiled in rather a startled fashion.

"Why, William — this is delightfully — er — unusual! You ought to be at chess with Mary!"

Dr. Sales sat down on a spidery iron chair. He spoke low, for it was a rule in the library not to speak at all. However, as Henry was the only reader present, there was no particular indiscretion in his whisper.

"Mary and I have quarreled, Henry."

The little Grinscoombe fell back astonished from his big volume and looked as troubled as a Martian can look, when disturbed by earthly forces.

"Oh, my dear William! But you know how quick-tempered Mary is!"

"She has really hurt me. And I'm worried about her."

"Worried about Mary?" The poor Martian had now plunged into very deep currents of worldly trouble. He shut his finger into the volume and rested its edge upon his sharp small knee. It was a huge tome. His face peered anxiously above it. His nostrils unconsciously inhaled its familiar pleasant, leathery smell. He would be glad to get back to it after so wretched an interruption. Henry did not permit himself to dislike William Sales, but, with permission from a too masterly conscience, he could have disliked him very acidly.

"Mary has been foolish enough to fall in love."

"What are you saying, sir!" The sharp, clear Grinscoombe voice was reminiscent of Miss Selda's. It roused the lazy masterfulness of Sales's.

"Just an unpleasant truth. You have allowed little Mary to mother you so long through all your adversities that you've quite forgotten that she might need a little fathering — is n't that it?"

"I am not accustomed to being admonished as to the way in which I conduct my privacy."

"Perhaps not. But plenty of people, if they had the courage, would have very plentifully and frequently admonished you. In all honesty, Henry, you have to admit that, as a father — but I don't want to quarrel with you." The bully was satisfied now with the white, silent anguish of his victim.

Henry Grinscoombe was going through a process which he called "clarification." He was being, as he had always disastrously and gloriously succeeded in being — honest with himself. He went over, with a

student's painstaking thoroughness, his record as Mary's father and put down an unexpectedly black mark against it. Then, removing from his eyes the hand that had shielded from observation his painful self-interrogation, he spoke purely and gallantly.

“I have not done my duty by Mary. I accept this from you, and I will act upon it. But I don't want to sit here and listen to your judgments, which, on the whole, have never been convincing, nor to any confidence which Mary has seen fit to give you. I will not force her confidence, but I will try to make for her an opportunity for asking my help if she feels the need of it.”

Grinscoombe had stood up, putting down his volume, and now Sales rose with one of his usual ponderous, untidy motions.

“You'll do nothing of the sort, Henry!” — and he caught Mary's father by the arm in one of his soft, undecided hands; “you'll listen to me now. She's in love with her precious cowboy and I know him to be an adventurer, the scum of the West. He's trying to seduce Sophie and to trap Heloise Grinscoombe into a marriage. What he is doing to Mary —”

“Be silent, William!” — and it might figuratively be said that Henry Grinscoombe both towered and thundered. “The young man is my friend. I know him as though I had looked through a powerful lens into his heart. Nothing you can concoct would shake a fiber of my feeling for this young man. If Mary loves him —”

“You'd give her to an ignorant, nameless —”

Up went Henry's hand in the commanding Grinscoombe gesture.

"I give Mary to no man. She is not in my gift. To me, ignorance or wisdom is a matter outside the judgment of schools. The young man is not ignorant. In no true sense of the word is he ignorant. If he is nameless, remember that if I had lived by the darkness of your creed, William, my first child must have been nameless. Your knowledge of this man is prejudice, from the surface in. My knowledge of him is from the soul out. 'It is not that which goeth into a man that defileth him,' William, 'but that which cometh out,' and from Q. Kinwydden, the man I know, cometh no vile thing. Prodigal he may have been, wayward and untamed he is, but liar and traitor and philanderer he is not — We are making a disturbance in the library!"

The little gentleman had not, as a matter of fact, raised his delicate voice, but the syllables were piercing; over their vibrations, Sales's glabrous syllables smothered down weightily —

"I intend to marry Mary," he said. "You will not work against me, Henry, when I remind you that —"

"That I am in your debt?" Grinscoombe drew himself up to his uttermost inch and his white parrache waved free. "It shall be paid, sir." He bowed. "But never, let me assure you, in the person of my daughter." A queer flash of humor, at once cynical and sweet, broke up his face into frosty twinklings. "My good William, you've been watching the drama too closely, have n't you? — perhaps the drama of

the screen. I am told that the daughters of shadow-land are frequently victimized in this fashion. The father is forced into indebtedness, the daughter pays." He laughed; he had a merry laugh, an echo of Mary's — the two laughs had grown into harmony through the gay, sad, struggling, happy years. "Oh, William!" — he shook his head — "I have always been ashamed of my suspicions of your friendship. I am sorry my intuition has been justified. There is no virtue in your charity, Sales. It is a very bad debt. It must be paid."

He looked down at a mass of finely scribbled manuscript. He pinched together tight his face. His beloved and unprofitable work! — and, bundling up the papers under his arm, he went away from Sales as though the big bulk of a man had become non-existent to him.

But out on the street, Grinscoombe's flush faded. He drooped. He came home to Mary, looking beaten, humbled, and depressed. Nor did he, on that day, utter one word of the painful and absorbing experience to Mary. He watched her a great deal, closely, tenderly, discerningly, and shaded his watching with a tremulous, fine hand.

CHAPTER XIV

DIPLOMACY

THE letter that Q had dropped into the post-box in defiance of Mary's counsel bore fruit in action, as is the mysterious fashion of such seed, and on a Thursday afternoon, Laurence Sales left his motor and walked into the lobby of the River Hotel. He looked and thought himself cool as chilled iron; memory itself brought no quickness to his pulses; nevertheless, his eyes threw an involuntary glance toward the dining-room, but Sophie, at the moment, was washing dishes in her pantry and thinking him fifty miles or so away. Mr. Benton lifted a sallowed face in his cage and his lips fell apart.

"So you've come back to Sluypenkill, Dr. Laurie," said he, employing a toothpick as he spoke and pulling his lips into the semblance of an hotel-keeper's smile.

"Only to see a patient" — Laurie made no effort to smile and spoke shortly. "A man with queer name — Kinwydden. I've an appointment with him."

"What — you don't say! Mr. Kinwydden — but he's not sick! He came back this morning after a five days' absence, during which they tell me he worked at the mills. Great character, Kinwydden! Queer chap!"

"Will you find out if he can see me now?"

The answer reported presently by grinning Bill

was — "Turn him loose," and Laurie was lifted to the fourth floor.

At the door of Room 90 he knocked and, on being told to enter in a voice that suggested patience, he found himself facing a tall and bronzed young man faultlessly dressed and very perfectly groomed, who, at sight of him, turned a deep copper color and rippled out an oath. Laurie set down his bag and held out his hand.

"Mr. Cartwright — by all that's surprising!" he said.

Q's face was regularly assaulted by shocks of red. He was profoundly discomposed. Last of all people had he expected to see in Laurence Sales the keen, clever, red-headed young man that had rescued and admonished him on the occasion of his uncomfortable New York experience. The very apparent superiority of this admonisher, his shrewd humor sense, his authority, his self-restraint, had impressed themselves forcibly on the sensitive observation of Q. Sophie's "Laurie boy" who needed "one of them long bones down his back," whom he had been minded to shake into manliness — to thrash into a decision favorable to romance, if necessary — vanished into a thin, thin mist. What face to present to the man with humorous and impatient eyes Q could not now decide.

"What's wrong with the wrist? You have n't been rescuing any more ladies in distress, I hope?"

Q had stepped back and had sat down on the edge of his bed. He was meditating soberly and swiftly if

it would be possible then and there to gash his wrist convincingly with his pocket knife or to do some other self-justifying damage. Under Laurie's sardonic, dancing eyes he relinquished the idea. He decided to hold his peace — it was the method that had always served him best — so, in silence, he held out a strong brown hand. Across the wrist ran a violent scar and Laurie bent over it and felt about it with clever fingers.

"It's not inflamed nor swollen," he said. "Any pain?"

"It's almighty difficult for me," said Q truthfully, "to handle a pen."

"You mean you feel a stiffness in your fingers? Flex them."

"What in thunder — ?"

"Bend them." Q obeyed, his eyes lowered. The strong, long fingers clenched and relaxed powerfully.

Laurie, impersonal and interested, felt carefully up and down the muscles of the arm and made some tests to which Q surrendered himself with Sphinx-like gravity.

"Tell me the story of the wound," demanded the baffled surgeon, sitting down in the chair opposite his queer patient and looking at him with a bewildered air.

Q slowly obeyed him. "A lady," he said, had "knifed him" — by accident. She had meant to cut a stick and she had cut his arm instead. It had been sewed up by Dr. Sales — any relation? A father? Is that so? It had seemed to heal all right. — Yes, it had sure

seemed to heal. If it was n't for the trouble guidin' a pen —

Laurie rose impatiently, produced a tablet and pencil and presented them to Q.

"Here — write something for me."

Q stared for a moment into space, then laboriously fashioned a phrase. "I am reskuing a lady now," he wrote, "I am reskuing a lady for you."

Room 90 was dangerously silent while Sales read this message. He read it and looked up sharply. His face revealed an unsuspected haggardness.

"Will you explain yourself?" he asked, and Q remembered that red-headed people were apt to be violent.

"I don't rightly know how I can," he said, speaking very quietly and rather soothingly, as to a restive horse. "I've been thinkin' you was one of these fellers that needs to be yanked by the collar to get their circulation goin'."

"So it was to yank me by the collar that you faked an injured wrist, eh?"

Q continued evenly, with no attention to this comment: "But I see you ain't. So I reckon I've been makin' a fool of myself again. And I'd be pleased if you'd lope back to West Lemmon and leave me to bury myself on the lone prairie — unless you'd be carin' to tell me — " He stopped and looked at Laurie with a certain wistfulness. "Out on the range," he said, "I've got a partner, Shorty by name — some-ways you favor him — "

Laurie was conscious of a thrill, unusual and pro-

found. He knew that such a man as the one before him rarely laid himself so open to rebuff.

"What," asked Laurie slowly, "do you want to know?"

Q spoke, without looking at him, very low. "Why hev you quit writin' letters to the Sophie gel?"

At that Laurie began to roam about the room, his hands in his pockets, and his head bent.

"But, Kinwydden," he explained, in a tone composed of exasperation and patience, "it's the last story on earth I could tell, or explain, to an outsider — especially to you. I suppose you know one side of the story. I suppose that, living here, you have seen Sophie, got to know her — that she has told you — well" — frowning down at him — "she would. I can see that — ! You being what you are, a confidence from her is pretty nearly inevitable. But I am not — Sophie, nor are my confidences very easily compelled."

Q said nothing and, as usual, his silence worked for him.

"You are — or were, a cowboy — are n't you?" rather unexpectedly, Laurie demanded.

"Yes, sir — was and is — at least, not now, I ain't."

In the midst of considerable confusion of heart and mind, Laurie was constrained to smile. "Well, then, did you love your work — was it a career?"

"Hosses — and cattle — yes, sir. I liked the round-ups and the ridin' and the range — " To his own surprise Q's throat tightened on this speech, and he stopped with dry lips.

“I don’t believe,” Laurie went on rapidly, “that Sophie could tell you what my profession means to me. Nor what my ambitions are, nor how profoundly I’ve felt that her future and her happiness would be quite definitely endangered by — It’s queer enough to find myself talking to you about it!”

“No, that ain’t so queer. Or anyway, if it is, forget it. Likely you don’t know what she’s been goin’ through since you quit her. Not havin’ a career herself” — for the life of him, Q could not keep the edged drawl from his voice — “you can’t hardly call biscuit-shootin’ a career, and bein’ a woman — ” with a guileless air Q looked up. “Fancy her bein’ married to Jonas Benton,” he said.

Laurie stood with his head thrown back and breathed hard.

After a turn or two he walked over to the window. “It’s been three years,” he muttered; “has n’t she forgotten yet?”

“In three years?” Q drawled. “Your Sophie gel? Not in thirty will she forget.”

He stared at Sales’s back and Sales stared down into the street. Into the silence came a muffled tread and the faint clinking of ice, followed by a knocking at Q’s door. He had told Sophie to bring him a pitcher of iced lemonade at four o’clock. Now, “I am going to send her away,” he said firmly, and crossed the room.

But Laurie was ahead of him and, an instant later, a tray crashed to the floor outside Q’s door, Sophie stood inside the closed room and Laurie had her in his

arms. Q walked to a window, clutched its sill and, looking down into Main Street, wished himself in the saloon. Back of him there was a quick-breathing silence, until Sophie spoke. She said two words, sobbing. "My heart."

It frightened Q, who faced about. He saw that hers was a heart unbearably, swiftly enlarged by joy. Laurie's, however, was already shrunk by pain. He was walking to and fro about the room, his red head bent, his under lip bitten, his hands locked behind him so that the knuckles were white. Lines had sprung into visibility around his mouth. Sophie was watching him; her beauty paled.

"I — did n't know," she faltered. "It was n't any doings of mine, Laurie."

"Of course not — " He jerked this out. Then he turned upon Q, his quick, restless eyes ablaze.

"Will you give us your room for five minutes, please, master diplomat, while I try to put some broken pieces together again? You might gather up what's left of the pitcher — it won't be half so hard as what I've got to do. Sophie" — he went over to her as Q hastened to the door — "did n't you know that I was engaged to be married? I wrote to you."

Her lips said "no," making a white, noiseless motion. Q shut the door and found himself across the hall, gripping the balustrade of the stair-well and gazing blindly down at the white and chocolate squares of the floor three flights below him. He could hear the murmur of Laurie's voice. It went on after the first sentences more evenly. Q was remembering

the branding of small calves. He had always hated that — hated the way their soft eyes rolled, trying to find the lost protecting mother body — there had been something like that in Sophie's eyes. He gripped the balustrade more tightly. Gradually he became aware of Benton's head bending over his big memorandum book down in his cage, and his long, cadaverous hand making cramped writing therein. Benton, long and flabby and lukewarm, whose breath always reminded Q of the exhalation of a steam radiator, meant to marry Sophie. She would walk out of her enchantment into Benton's slack and absorbent embrace —

"You are willing," Mary had asked, "to take the responsibility of bringing these two people together?"

The voices in the room had altogether stopped. Q's fancy summoned pictures. He saw Sophie crumpled into a chair, Laurie stroking her cold hands, murmuring out his meaningless remorse, his worse than useless consolation. The picture was different from the truth, for, though Sophie had thrown herself down by his bed and had smothered her weeping in her arms, Laurie was attempting no consolation, expressing no remorse. He was sitting in Q's chair, the width of the room away, his hands between his knees, his eyes fixed upon the carpet.

After an interminable while, "Stop crying, my dear," said Laurie, apparently to the carpet; "I see now that it won't do."

He pulled a long and shaken breath, leaned slowly back in his chair and began to fill his pipe. He was

thinking, it might be imagined, vividly. His brown, nervous eyes were seeing consequences. This was evidently a man at once intellectually cool and emotionally hot, an adventurer by instinct, a conservative by conviction, romantic in feeling and cynic in philosophy, a gifted and tormented being for whom life would be forever thorned. The inertia of a father who decided nothing until fate gave him some ignoble lead, had left unused, perhaps, all this flame and swiftness, all this unhurried steel decision, to afflict the delicate organism of the son. Laurie had been trapped, not only by circumstances but by his nature. Now he was at work, one half fighting the other, trying to release his heart from the toils and at the same time to clear his honor of an obligation. "I did n't know until I heard your step outside the door, Sophie, that these last three horrible years have just made no difference at all. I've been deceiving myself."

"I knew."

She had lifted her head from her arms and, still kneeling, was looking at him across the narrow white counterpane. It was a beaten face, deep-eyed. Pain had released every last secret of its beauty.

Laurie's brain looked at it through the tumult of his blood.

"I'd forgotten that I loved you." He laughed softly. "Is n't that queer — so — Sophie — to forget —?"

"I knew you'd only to see me — men are like that!"

His face narrowed into keenness.

“Oh, no,” she professed instantly, “it was n’t my plan. It was his — Q’s. I told him — you’ll have to forgive me for that, because I could n’t help it. I *had* to tell him what I’d been going through. Laurie, he’s the only one I’ve told. You don’t know Q! These three years have been awful long — and hard — for me.”

“I know.” Laurie bit in under his lip, for she hurt him.

“But you are going to marry some one else,” Sophie faltered, touching the words with a voice that shrank from them.

“No. That’s what I’m trying to tell you. I see now that I can’t. Sophie, we’re back where we were three years ago — that’s all. It’s to do all over again, only in the meantime, trying to free myself from you, I’ve hurt somebody else.”

She stood up slowly. “I see. Poor Laurie!”

This bent him, a hand over his eyes.

“Don’t! Don’t *you* say that!”

She came around the bed, knelt beside him and put her long arms about him.

“You are not to be unhappy — you are not. Laurie,” with a soft sudden little cry, “you are getting gray!”

“Am I?” He laughed shakily, drawing himself away. “I deserve to be. I’d better go. I can’t stand much more of this.”

She brightened as if fire had come close to her. “Oh, *no*. Must you? Let me — oh, please, Laurie, let me just be near you for a little while. I won’t

“speak to you, I won’t touch you, I won’t even look at you. I want to be near you. It rests me. I feel all the time now — so tired.”

She was still kneeling beside his chair and she sank back on her heels, and folded her hands and looked up at him with a large, simple, childlike look; as though her eyes fed upon him.

He smiled faintly and sat down, holding out his arms. She crept into them and he held her like a child, and presently their lips met. So they stayed together, silent, in happiness and in pain; nothing more exquisite in sensation, perhaps, than what life gave them with its generous taloned hands. It was Sophie that moved first. She was suddenly afraid. They found themselves standing the room apart, white-faced, fast-breathing. Laurie then walked rapidly across the room, picking up his bag and hat, and went out. He did not so much as look at her again, and started blindly down the stairs.

It was no movement on Q’s part that caught his attention, perhaps it was only the intentness of the Westerner’s silence, but, half a flight down, Laurie did look up and saw Q, gripping the balustrade above him.

Laurie hesitated. Q’s eyes said, “You are not agoin’ to quit her, are you?” but, for the moment, never guessing how their look would haunt and fashion him to its desire, they only tightened his resolve. He smiled coldly and faintly, nodded his head and went rapidly down the steps.

Q wandered restlessly up and down the faded

scarlet hallway; its stuffiness oppressed his lungs and spirit. He began to be afraid of Sophie's long silence in his room. A slovenly maid went by and stared at him wonderingly. A sleek, handsome, impudent-eyed drummer passed him, whistling, gave him a mocking scrutiny before he stepped into the elevator. Q remembered that he had seen this young man pursuing Sophie with an ingratiating address. "That feller," Q commented automatically, "has a mean mouth and a cold eye." Almost as automatically he deduced a formula, "Some folks has to laugh mean, thataway, so's to get even with God."

The elevator dropped out of sight with its unconscious victim of analysis and, a moment later, Sophie stumbled out of the door of Room 90. She looked broken and dulled; she crept out of sight, her steps noiseless on the faded crimson carpet.

Q, who had brought this misery about and could not understand its reason, quirted his heart with indignation and outraged sympathies.

CHAPTER XV

A MESSAGE FROM THE MOON

THE morning after that August day on which Kinwydden had so signally failed to recommend himself either to his school-mistress or to the mistress of his heart, he had sat down and written a letter to Mary. It was written in the dry, tight-strung weariness that follows a sleepless night, for, true to his own prediction, the phrases Heloise had used to punish him for the foolhardiness of his deliberately incited runaway, had kept him tossing and swearing in a rumpled bed. And yet, it was not so much the words that hurt as it was their emphasis, the deliberate insolence of beloved eyes and lips. He did not know how to name it, but, free man that he was, he felt the insult of it in every fiber of him. The aristocrat to the canaille — he would not have so worded the manner of her wrath, but, when a man strikes with a whip rather than with a fist, so does he smite as Heloise had smitten him, and even from her justifiable anger, this was not what his love deserved; it was surely not what his love deserved.

DEAR MISS MARY [Q had written that morning with exceeding carefulness and very bitter gravity], I am going to give you a holiday from teaching me and I am going to give myself a holiday from A B C. I feel like I would go loco if I did n't do some work with my hands. My case is like the man with a weak head and a strong back. I am going down to the Mills to learn something of the trade. A man can

never tell when such things are going to turn out useful to him; in the sort of life I lead I have put my hand to a many kinds of work and making carpets ought to come in useful when the free land is all took up and built over with two-story houses. I will bunk with a working-man who is a friend of mine. He has made me a member of his club so I won't be lonesome. Tell your father I will meet him evenings as per usual, and after five days I will be back at my copy-book again and working out how many miles per day the man walked that walked 117 miles in a week going one mile more each day than he did the day before. It will be Friday when I come back, for Thursday afternoon is when Dr. Laurie Sales is coming up to see me here at the hotel. Have you thought any about that Sophie girl?

Yours respectfully

Q.

For five days Q had kept himself at the Mills grinding out from his heart the memory of Heloise and following the tracking impulse of his hatred. There was much valuable information to be gathered concerning William Sales's career in and about the Mills. Q learned the history of the lawsuit that, thanks to Miss Selda's skillful New York lawyer, failed; he learned stories of the Hospital, and he ingratiated himself, by means of an injured finger, with Dr. Sales's favorite nurse, who was the head nurse and had held the position against all comers. For a few months, about three years before, it appeared there had been an upheaval at the Mills Hospital, under the brief intrusion of young Dr. Ellison, but there had risen very shortly the scandal that had been used against him by Miss Selda and through which he had been forced to leave the place. Q discovered there was a wide vari-

ety of opinion concerning the responsibility for this particular scandal — an operation that had failed. These investigations had kept Q from thinking too much about Heloise. He would not go to her again, he swore, until she sent for him; his will had set itself like iron to conquer hers — all softness of feeling seemed to have been lashed out of his heart. He had eased it by a frank homesickness for Mary. It was for her that he allowed himself to hunger. His missing of her had become by the fifth day of exile a joyous expectation. He was impatient to be reconciled to her; he would not let her stay angry with him; he would coax back the smile and the ruddy brightness to her face. He remembered that after that last lesson she had looked pitifully white and tired.

By the time Q stood on the small shabby familiar porch he was as happily excited as a boy. His eyes were deep with their anticipation. When Mary opened the door, it was all he could do not to catch her up in his arms. He laughed to hide the intensity of his delight.

“I’ve come back, like the boy that plays hooky — kind of scared,” he said. “What are you agoin’ to do to me?”

“Nothing,” said Mary.

She had smiled very faintly in response to the dazzling illumination of his smile and was now leading him listlessly along the little hall.

Q’s heart took a sudden surprising downward swoop. He dropped his books on the table and looked down at her.

"You were right," he said quickly. "I want to tell you before we get to work — and, Miss Mary, I am going to work awfully hard, you're sure going to be pleased with me — that you were right as to the foolishness of meddling. I will never do it no more."

She looked at him steadily for the first time. "You mean — Laurie Sales and Sophie? Oh, I dare say you are quite right about that. I thought it over afterwards. Happiness — to get people their happiness — is almost a duty. It must be right to try for that."

She took her place opposite him, but she was no longer the eager, candid little teacher. He would hardly have known her. She sat, stooping a little; looked away from him with veiled eyes. Even her hair had lost some of its ruddy sparkle.

Q pressed his lips tight and, covertly observing her, opened his book. He had been promoted to a simplified edition of *Æsop's Fables* and he began where he had left off.

"The wind blew but the traveler only drew his cloak closer about him —"

"Miss Mary," he said sharply, "you look like you had lost a friend."

At that she glanced over at him quickly. After a second, "I have," she said.

"You don't mean" — Q's voice was uncertain with dread — "that you have quit being a friend to me?"

"Oh, no!" Her color rose in a flood that ought to have betrayed her to him, only that he was leagues from the gateway to such understanding.

He breathed freely again. "But you've lost — some other friend?"

She nodded and frowned a little. "Let's don't talk about it, Q. I've had an anxious time. Things have been bothering me. I believe it's done me good already to see you. You blow everything about like a strong wind. Tell me — like the cows, I'm curious — was n't it a success, your plot for Sophie?"

"No, ma'am — not anything like that. I made a fool of myself and it don't bear talkin' of. To-day Sophie looks about like you do — only she's lost a lover, which hits harder."

Mary smiled one of those complex smiles of hers that twisted into one expression so many strands of quick emotion.

"They met — Laurie and Sophie?"

"Yes, ma'am, in my room. But he has quit her again. And I reckon this time it's for good and ever, which makes it worse'n it was for the poor gel. Honest, it scares me — she looks so downed and desp'rit . . . sort of like an easy victim for any feller. Them drummers hangin' 'round. Whenever I think about her I'd like some one to take me out and beat me up. I *was* almighty sure of myself, Miss Mary, like you said I was, but now I ain't. I think it's likely I'll never be so sure of myself again. Knowin' hosses, I hev discovered, ain't so much of a help in knowin' people. Hosses hev got so much more sense. You can figger on what they will be likely to do. I'm plumb discouraged with the things folks do. I reckon I'd better quit tryin' to run the earth. It ain't rightly my corral."

Mary was smiling, a doubtful brightness returning

to her face. “I don’t know. Perhaps you’d run it rather well. Tell me about the Mills. Did you enjoy making carpets?”

She fancied that his real motive had been to collect some money and, because of the price he had paid for his lessons, this distressed her. She was quite desperately bent, these days, upon collecting money herself, but, on his account, she felt compunction.

“Yes, ma’am. It’s a right interesting process.” He described it to her, at some length, vividly, and gave her a picture of his life — that part of it disconnected from his more serious pursuit.

“And they paid you well?”

“Fair wages — of course my labor was n’t what you’d call skilled. Miss Grinscombe don’t pay so high as some of the mill-owners. If she did she’d get a better type of workman and her carpets would n’t suffer none. I’d like to talk it over with her, if she was n’t bound on the north, south, east, and west by Dr. Sales.”

“What are you saying, Q?”

“That’s just a notion of mine, Miss Mary. He’s a dangerous sort of feller — doc.”

Mary was making absent hieroglyphics with her pencil. She was frowning, and flushed.

“What makes you think anything so — strange as that?”

Q looked at her with all his keenness. He thought a minute before he spoke. “Last time we was talkin’ of doc,” he drawled, “you would n’t hev swallowed so easy-like what I said jest now. Since I was last

here, Miss Mary, you hev been findin' doc out some, have n't you? Ain't he maybe the friend you lost? Was n't it me that begun to put you wise to him?"

Mary prudently answered only his last question. "No — you amazing creature, it was not." She considered even this answer before she made it, still drawing little squares and circles, but looking him in the face with the eyes of her perplexity. "You know what it is to be bothered about money, don't you?"

"No, ma'am. But I know right well what it is to be bothered about — no money. Though I can't say it ever did bother me a lot — not havin' any. It don't, you know, if you can work with your hands."

"It bothers me," said Mary, "dreadfully. And I hate to think what a preposterous sum I'm charging you for this education of yours."

"That's a real word, Miss Mary — pre-post-er-ous. Let me put my brand on it, will you? It means —"

"Out of all reason," Mary hazarded.

"Well, that ain't the truth. Anyways, even if it was, I would n't let it give you any sufferin'. I've got the price of my education laid by. Miss Mary, this is the first time in my life I hev ever bothered about money. It's the first time I've ever had the chanct."

"How did you make the price of your education, Q? Guiding?"

"No, ma'am. It was wished onto me, like my name." He lifted his eyes to her with a curious wistfulness. "Miss Mary," he said, "I am awful rich."

Mary wondered why her heart stood still. Then she understood and was angry with herself. If Q were

really "awful rich," might not the towers and walls of Grinscoomberry, which she fancied impregnable to his knight-errantry, be shaken before his lance? A great fortune — that would go far toward softening the hardness of Miss Selda's opposition, of Heloise's young worldliness. An ungrammatical millionaire may be forgiven where an ungrammatical cowboy remains forever amongst the unforgivable. But how could a generous heart sink at knowing that Q had a chance of winning his desire? Mary convicted herself and passed judgment. Then with a smile more winning than she could have imagined, she held out her hand across the table to Q.

"My dear," she said, "I am so *glad*."

His fingers fastened down over hers and enveloped them in warmth and strength and comfort.

"It don't do me much good, Miss Mary, except to make me hanker after the moon, which is the sort of thing a man can't buy."

"Oh," she suggested, "can't he?" Then, seeing his flush, she was ashamed. "Of course, in a sense, not," she hurriedly amended, drawing away her hand, "but, amongst people that have always had wealth and can't imagine being without it, a fortune is bound to count, Q."

He had leaned back in his chair and his face was masked and rather pale. He had fixed his eyes upon her in the through-gazing fashion that distinguished them, and Mary felt that all her motives and impulses were bitterly exposed.

"Please go on with your lessons, Q," she cried out an instant later.

"Just a minute, ma'am. You said you was botherin' about money. If you was a right sensible young woman, you would n't be doin' any more of that."

"Why not?" Mary asked blankly, then colored hot and high.

"When a partner of mine has a fortune, I don't never do no botherin' — gel."

"Q — you are simply absurd. Go on with your lessons, please, or I'll give you a bad mark."

"To take home to Benton — eh?"

"No — to take home to Heloise. Is she interested in your education, Q?"

In her effort to escape from her embarrassment, Mary had taken the first conversational opening her mind suggested to her, and dashed into a subject which the delicacy of her sympathy had hitherto kept sacred.

"Not so's you'd notice it," returned Q dryly and took up his book.

In the midst of his reading, the telephone bell rang and Mary, answering it, turned to her pupil with one of her waggish looks. "Some one to speak to you," she said — "a message from the moon."

He was white when he stood up and moved to the instrument like a sleep-walker. In his ear came the swift, imperious voice that had so injured him.

"Q — can you come out this afternoon — at four o'clock? — it's important."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Where have you been — these days?"

"Laborin' with my hands to ease my heart," said Q, unsmiling.

"How queer. You'll come, then?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Surely?"

"Ain't I tellin' you so?"

"I don't know, Q, what may happen to me if you don't come."

"Nothin' is agoin' to happen to you, then."

"Good-bye."

Her voice in all the brief sentences had been a trifle breathless, abstracted. She was not flirting, nor tormenting, nor laughing. She was afraid. He knew that in all his nerves. He strode back to his lessons and Mary felt that she was entirely forgotten. Her pupil stumbled absently through arithmetic lesson and history lesson and went away from her as though the mind of Heloise had put some sort of enchantment on his steps.

Mary, when he had gone, walked about the room in a dry-eyed misery of anger and hurt pride; hating herself, and her life, and her love. When her little father came, fifteen minutes later, he dropped his books hastily on the nearest chair, came to her and held out his arms. Mary crept close to him, put her head on his shoulder, and wept.

They sat in the distended wicker chair, the little father stroking her and murmuring comfort. At last they spoke of Q and of Dr. Sales and of the debt. Presently their hearts were greatly eased; they could laugh at each other; they could even begin to make plans.

"I'll have to try very determinedly, Mary, to turn

my pen to profit. I ought long ago to have made such an effort."

Mary hid her pathetic smile. She knew so well that his pen would prove as impotent a gold-digger as could well be fashioned, but she gallantly supported his determination and together they outlined a possible series of articles on education, concerning the ultimate success of which they managed to convince themselves quite emphatically. Lunch-time was completely forgotten and by the tea-hour they were busy, brisk, soberly cheerful people — Mary pouring tea with steadiness, though her eyes still showed traces of her stormy weeping.

Out in the garden of Grinscoombe Manor, Heloise too was pouring tea, iced tea from an enormous silver pitcher. As she poured it the ice rattled because her hand was shaking. A tiger cub is a fascinating pet, subtle, beautiful, and astonishing. But as it grows from cub-hood and its tiger nature strengthens in throat and talons, the small fearfulness that made it a delight increases to something that is not a delight at all. Excitement was a necessity to Lelo's restless and unsatisfied temperament. Ferdinand, for the past few months, had increasingly supplied her with the stimulant. She had enjoyed playing with his impatience, holding out a morsel and snatching it away again, letting her eyes promise what her hands and lips withheld, playing, in fact, a game as old as sex, in which the centuries have made women more and more proficient, men more and more practiced to enjoy.

Given emotional leisure, and almost any woman may become a Cleopatra and any man a Don Juan. The old sex channels are worn so deep in consciousness, deeper than any recent scribblings of religion, morality, or wisdom, it requires only a slight diversion to send the floods running deep and free. Heloise had had leisure and a wound; she was dangerous. Ferdinand was the male counterpart of her condition. He was vulnerable and impatient, thwarted, sufficiently uncertain and sufficiently masterful. Heloise's daring increased hand in hand with her alarm. So far she had kept her balance, but lately it had been with increasing difficulty. The artificial supremacy of girlhood was imperiled, because Ferdinand's imperious passions, always his spoiled children, were growing like the talons of the baby tiger. When she was safely out of his sight, Heloise would laugh at her nerves, but no sooner did his sultry blue eyes fall to devouring her again than fear, excitement, weakness shook her. After her failure to meet him at the club-house on the afternoon of Q's deliberately excited runaway, Ferdinand had lost no time in flinging himself down before his steering-wheel and eating up twelve miles of heated concrete to demand from her an explanation. He had been in the gold reception-room when Heloise had run upstairs — had just, in fact, been giving a message to the footman; and, seeing her hurry past the door, he had begun to fume, to pull at his tiny blond mustaches, and to prowling about the room like some large, graceful, angry animal. Heloise had taken time to rearrange her golden helmet. She knew

that he was down there fuming, and she began to be nervous. She had presented to him, however, between the long gold curtains, when he turned at the sound of her coming, a figure of such cool green slimmness and snow-whiteness that a characteristic compliment had sprung past his anger to his lips.

“You look like a mint julep, Lelo — hanged if you don’t — some heavenly cool green fragrant drink in a tall glass — makes a man’s throat tingle to look at you!” Then, having her smile, he returned deliberately to his humor. “So you chose to keep me waiting this afternoon! Was n’t it four o’clock that you said you’d be at the club? It’s half-past six now — ” He turned a sullen eye to the gold-faced clock below Sir Sydney Grinscoombe.

“I’ve been run away with in the interval,” said Heloise, “by a wild and woolly Westerner,” and with that, staggering her with its sudden fury, his temper had broken. He had stormed, thick-voiced, pale-lipped, about the fragile room, so used to reticence; he had damned Q; he had told her his opinion of her methods. “Damn cruel, teasing, selfish — ” Heloise, all white, her narrowed eyes as green as her dress, had pushed him away at the end, her two slim hands planted against his chest, which, under its silken shirt, had scorched her palms so that, that night, she tried to rub the memory away against her cool bed-linen. She did not know, she had told him, how he had dared to come so close to her, to touch her —

“I’ve — touched you before,” he had stammered; “better take your hands off me — ” And, plucking

them from him, he had crumpled them both painfully into one of his, had put his arm close about her, had held the hands to his mouth. Heloise, for the first time, had realized a man's bodily strength. For a minute she could not so much as get breath into the scant space he had left her in a hot, misty, whirling world. She had gasped "Aunt Selda!" and had found herself free. Ferdinand was moving backwards away from her; his eyes looked bruised.

"Next time," he had mumbled with his insolent, clumsy lips, "I'll get some satisfaction from you, you white witch!"

Heloise had sat weakly down in one of the small, gilded chairs. Her wrists had felt emptied of blood. It had been terrible, and exciting, more exciting than Q's game with death. He was wrong — it might be more healthful and more honest, but as a galloping incentive to quick breath there was no potency in it to compare with this other game. Aunt Selda had come in slowly; she had passed Ferdinand, it seemed, in the hall.

"I hope you've sent that man away for good, Heloise," she had said.

"Gracious, no!" Heloise had laughed, looking composure from serene, dissembling young eyes, "he is the delight of my life, Aunt Selda. He'll be back soon and I'll teach him his lesson. I am getting to be a regular lion-tamer."

Aunt Selda had looked at her, several phrases on her tongue, but she had restrained it from pronouncement. Aunt Selda understood her niece.

Now, on the Friday afternoon, in the garden under a striped canvas umbrella, a wicker table between her and her visitor, Heloise found that she could not command the shaking of her body. That morning, Ferdinand had announced his coming for tea and had "hung up." All day, Heloise had alternated between self-assurance and cold fear. It was her cold fear that had sent the S.O.S. to Q and spoiled his history lesson. Afterwards, she had wished she had n't sent for him, but not to the point of countermanding orders. No, on the whole, she had told herself, as she led Ferdinand along a box-hedged path to the garden table, she was glad that Q was on his way; he would by now have left the hotel . .

"Sit down in that chair, Ferdy," she said, "and keep there." She smiled at him with level eyes.

Ferdy obediently flung himself down in the appointed place. He looked sullen and inert, as though the heat of the day had taken some of the vigor out of him. The tiger was dull; his eyes had a drugged, sleepy expression. But Heloise's instinct set her to shaking while she reassured herself.

"I hope you're going to apologize, Ferdy, for your absurd exhibition last week. You are a spoiled child, if ever there was one. 'Take this cup and drink it up' — as the cross-patch rhyme says, then make me a nice respectful little speech and maybe I'll forgive you."

He took the tall glass silently in his big, white, steady hand and, looking down at her hand, he smiled slowly so that she could see the attractive line of his even white teeth.

“What are you shaking for?” he asked her and sat, staring down, and smiling.

Heloise leaned back and took up a work-bag she had carried with her. She laughed. “Do you think it’s because I’m afraid of you, Ferdy?”

“Well,” he said, “you know I’m mad about you, don’t you? And you know you’ve spent the last six months driving me mad, don’t you? You know what my wife does to me at home, don’t you? And you know what sort of man I am, don’t you? I think you’ve got some reason to be afraid of me — unless — ”

With that, slowly, ponderously, he looked up and the smile gradually left his lips. They sat and stared at each other, the thunder of quick pulses in their ears.

“Unless —?” Heloise found herself saying.

Ferdinand’s face changed violently and he got to his feet.

“For God’s sake,” he said, “send that fool away!”

Heloise turned and could have heartily echoed his curse. Q was coming along between the hedges, tall and grim and graceful. She wished him a thousand miles away. She knew now that to satisfy her craving for experience, she must play out this Ferdy game to the last dangerous move. Q’s coming was a postponement, perhaps a respite. She motioned soothingly to Ferdy.

“I sent for him on purpose,” she said, at which he prowled back to his place and drained his glass at one breathless draught.

CHAPTER XVI

WHIP HAND

WHILE Ferdy drained his glass, Miss Selda Grinscoombe, in the very large, well-ordered bedroom that had been her father's and mother's, moved slowly about, taking off her gloves and hat and changing from black silk blouse and skirt to a sheer gown of gray batiste. The room was closely shaded from the outer heat and with a light breeze pouring steadily through the Venetian shades, it was almost cool. The old clean heavy chintz curtains, looped back, were lavender in tint, as were the draperies of the enormous four-posted bed, the covering of the lounge, and the cushions of the stiff mahogany chair. The rugs were purplish blue. In the large mirrors, of which there were several in the room, this dim gray-purple space with its tall occupant made many mysterious, ghostly reflections. Miss Selda, with her dark-gray hair, her stone-gray face, and her mist-gray dress, seemed far less solid than the huge bureaus and wardrobes. She swam about as a fish swims dimly in a grotto among large rocks.

Having completed her toilet, she sat down before the smaller of the two bureaus and fastened a bracelet on her narrow wrist. The tortoise-shell clock that matched her brushes and boxes and trays signaled to her with slender hands that it was five o'clock. She was tired. The early part of the afternoon had been

spent at a directors' meeting down at the Mills, where Miss Selda had been hard put to it in the defense of Dr. Sales. The protests against his mismanagement of the Mills Hospital had, it seemed, suddenly taken upon themselves a new and startling life and vigor. They had had weight and persistency. Not since the lawyer she had engaged in his defense several years before had so effectively cleared the physician had there been any such courageous attack against him. She was now told of proven mistakes, negligences that could not be palliated nor overlooked. The workmen had sent in a formal demand for his removal, for a thorough investigation of hospital conditions. Such a removal would be, for anything she might do, a death-blow to his practice in Sluypenkill. No influence that Grinscoomberry might bring to bear could save Dr. Sales, once his ignorance and indolence had been admitted by the directors and the board. Miss Selda had said what she dared in Sales's defense, not too much, not enough, probably, to prevent unpleasant developments. She thought now that she would go downstairs and write a forceful letter to Mr. Graham. She must, of course, do something. The old lash of her necessity stung her fagged spirit dully. She looked up from the fastening of her bracelet and met in the mirror her own staring gray eyes. That secret timidity of theirs revealed itself, and her heart missed its beat.

"It's the face of a coward," Miss Selda made comment, and wondered for a minute if, after thirty-nine long years of going softly, it might not be safe to fling

aside the old ugly precaution. She would like for the rest of her life to draw free breath.

Instead, she must in a few minutes meet her tyrant, the indolent, soft-tempered tyrant that, without so much as a spoken threat, had enveloped her whole life with a weight that she thought sometimes must have dragged her down from even a semblance of self-respect. Perhaps he had heard of the increased ill-feeling at the Mills and was coming to prod her championship. Miss Selda, setting her lips together and steadying her look, wished him dead. She was one of the women who, in more adaptable days, would have carried her poison in a ring. At the summons of a maid, however, she stood up, drenched a handkerchief in pungent cologne, and went downstairs to greet Sales in the drawing-room.

This was where Heloise and her friends had one merry evening toasted marshmallows, a room at once more informal and vastly more impressive than its gilded neighbor across the hall. All its sober browns and duns were now brightened by a broad afternoon light pouring steadily through four long windows, through which the lawn and river were visible in bands of green and silver. The air was moted and still; outside the locusts were in full-bodied, droning song. Dr. Sales stood with his back to the flood of light and looked to his hostess a solid mass edged with fire. He said, the instant she came in, "I have come on rather an unpleasant errand," and because this was so unlike his usual indirectness and suavity, Miss Selda felt dismay.

"Shall I ring for tea?" she asked doubtfully, and he considered the refreshment for a full minute, blowing in and out his lips.

"I believe not, thank you, Selda."

Then they seated themselves, Miss Selda drawing a curtain between her eyes and the hot light.

"Must you be unpleasant, William?" she asked unsmilingly. "I've had a very tiring meeting. All sorts of disagreeables came up — and I believe that, even as the owner of the Mills, my personal influence is not quite so strong as it used to be. William" — she looked straight at him and held herself very still — "you should try to mitigate the prejudice that exists against you. I am not sure myself that you have been either very efficient or dutiful in your management of the Hospital. It is not fair to rely upon my favor to palliate your neglect."

William's facial expression suffered a momentary dissolution as though pins had been taken out of a stretched piece of linen so that it went into flabbiness and disarrangement. He spread it out again by some inner reassurement.

"At least," he said, waiving her protest as though it had no importance, and feeling along his thinly trousered, dusty knees, "your influence in your own household is as strong as ever, is n't it?"

"I hope so." She drew up her velvet-banded neck and William smiled his easiest smile.

"Selda, I don't like Q. And I want to warn you that I can't countenance his association with Heloise."

Very faintly her grayness dyed itself. "You — can't — countenance?" she said, each syllable a stepping-stone across a very slough of deep disgust.

"Quite so. I can't and I won't. The young man must be put quite where he belongs, which is emphatically not in the position of a favored suitor of Heloise. What do you know about him, Selda?"

"Know about Q? But why should anything be known about such a person?"

Sales nodded over his fingers now sliding about his chin.

"I see. You simply let him by because you think he does n't sufficiently matter — is that it? But, Selda, I want to tell you that in justice to your dignity, you can't allow him the freedom of your house. He is making a laughing-stock of the Manor — all Sluypenkill is amused by this ignorant young adventurer, who is trying to seduce a hotel waitress and at the same time trying to win Miss Heloise Grinscoombe for his wife."

"What are you saying, William?"

"The truth. I have kept an eye on Q. T. Kinwyden — think of his name! and an ear open concerning him, too. He is neither a very safe nor a very nice young man. Take my word for it, Selda. He is playing fast and loose with any woman silly enough to be romantic over a handsome cowboy. I don't want Heloise and you to become a laughing-stock — well, more than that; it is n't safe for her to go about with him. She has encouraged his conceit. When the time comes, as of course it's bound to come, for her to ad-

minister a snubbing, she'll get a shock. That sort of experience with a man who is not a gentleman, whose women have been the girls of dancing-halls and dingy commercial hotels — who —"

"What do you want me to do, William?" Her voice was like a trembling blade. "Of course I don't accept a word of this!"

"Call him in here and send him to the right-about. He has given Heloise one fright — some people met her driving with him, and they tell me she looked like an angry ghost."

"But, William, you expect me to act upon an opinion which is emphatically not my own. You don't know the confidence I have felt in him, the — the —"

"I don't want to know anything except just that I am going to get my way in this matter. You may not be able to support my interests at the Hospital, but I do feel, at least, that here, where I am working only for your interests, I do deserve the consideration of being believed and yielded to. Heloise is being talked about as Q's alternative pleasure with a town waitress, and he is quite capable of boasting in the corner saloon of such exploits."

"You say — 'call him in'?"

"He's in your garden at present with Heloise. Can't he be sent for? Fadden is there, too."

Miss Selda's hands pressed each other. "Ferdinand Fadden?"

The doctor's bright, determined little eyes pricked her. No, he had never spoken his threat; but now his hand slipped, as though in absent-mindedness, into

pockets, and brought out a flat, thin pocket-book. He poked his fingers here and there as though instinctively they sought for old faded papers. He returned it to his coat as Miss Selda, gray-white, walked over to a bell.

"Please tell Mr. Kinwydden, Robert, that I want to see him in the drawing-room. You'll find him in the garden." She hesitated. "And tell Miss Heloise I want to see her, too; that she will have to excuse herself from Mr. Fadden. And now, William, since you dictate this necessity, what am I to say?"

"Ah, I suppose I can safely leave that to you, Selda. I am not disturbing myself on that account."

"You have brought no definite accusations. I have received this young man. He has always conducted himself quite beautifully. I like him." She smiled curiously. "I'm not sure that I don't love him."

"What nonsense, Selda! You are to forbid him the house — and Heloise!"

"Suppose she defies me."

"She will hardly do that."

"Come, William, you must really give me some plausible excuse for being brutal to a guest."

"Tell him that, as a dutiful guardian, you have investigated him, and don't like the results."

"In other words, I am to insult him with a lie."

"You were asking for help —" he protested sullenly.

"I believe I can do better without it."

They were silent. Miss Selda's face sharpened into its resemblance to a guillotined aristocrat. Presently

Heloise came in, followed by Q. Miss Selda, gripping the arms of her chair, looked up at them both with blank staring eyes. She had set the guard on wavering and self-betrayal, but she could not command her blood, which had left her set mouth. Dr. Sales played with his watch-chain, moved to the window, hummed softly.

"Q," said Miss Selda steadily, as one recites a lesson, "I am sorry to be driven to a most uncomfortable necessity." She paused. Heloise, who had dropped into a chair, stirred quickly, glancing at Q. He stood before Miss Selda, gently and shyly, a color in his cheeks. His face did n't change, but he looked slowly across the room at Dr. Sales's back, then slowly again at Miss Selda, and his eyes hardened.

"You're agoin' to tell me that you have heerd something against me."

"No," she said. "I have heard nothing against you. It is only that, after a great deal of difficult thinking, I have got some advice, and I have come to a conclusion. It might, after all, be easier for us both, if Heloise went out — "

At this Heloise rose quickly. "I'll go back to Ferdy," she said, and passed out of the room, witch-like and swift. Q looked after her, then back at Miss Selda. Now they were both pale.

"Did you call in doc because you thought mebbe what you was agoin' to hand to me would be too much for my health?" drawled Q.

"Dr. Sales is my — adviser," she answered quickly and proudly. She had now, helped by his scoring,

made up her mind to ruthlessness and had hardened the one small spot of compunction that had been Q's gift to her matured worldliness. After all, such would, in any case, have been the end of Q's courtship — "We have consulted together on the advisability of permitting your association with my niece. Of course, you must understand that I made a considerable concession to you in the first place, because I realized that the circumstances of your — acquaintance with her were decidedly out of the ordinary. But won't you sit down?"

He did sit down and looked thoughtfully from her to his folded hands. He seemed entirely cool and armored. Neither of them, after this, glanced at Sales, who, however, had turned about and was frankly enjoying the spectacle of Q's humiliation.

Now that she had steeled herself to using the knife, Miss Selda had determined to use it conclusively. She stared at Q as she spoke, and her lips moved more rapidly than usual.

"Now, without meaning to hurt you, I must confess that, in my opinion, Mr. Kinwydden, you have taken an unfair advantage of my indulgence. I gave you credit, perhaps, for a more acute perception and greater delicacy than would be at all natural for any one with your history."

"So I hev got a history!" Q murmured with unimpaired gentleness.

"I would be glad to hint, but I see that hinting fails. I have tried to show you by inference where I set the limits to your acquaintanceship with my niece,

but now I see that I must be brutally explicit. My dear young friend, you are not — frankly — acceptable as a suitor for Heloise. She would be amused at your pretensions if she could understand them — as I have slowly come to understand them. Your purpose in coming to the Manor, I am really forced to believe, has been to win the affections of my niece. I absolutely refuse to countenance such a purpose. You are a man of no education, no family, no breeding, no fortune. It can only, if it goes on, lead you to some far more painful experience than this one. It is easier for you to hear this plain speaking from me than to hear it eventually from her. My dear Q, already you are making her and me the laughing-stock of the place. I shall certainly not allow Heloise to be talked of or laughed about. You have other friends, more suitable, in the town, other far more accessible sweethearts. There! I have certainly spoken plainly. I have said, of course, a great deal more than enough. It has been painful to me. I had to make the lesson thorough and final. I am sure that you will never transgress the unwritten laws of hospitality in just this way again. You will probably go back to the West a wiser and soberer young man. Keep to your own kind, my dear Q; that's where your happiness and comfort lie. And I do sincerely wish you all the happiness in the world.” She stopped for a moment, the velvet band moved up and down as she swallowed convulsively. She was remembering the smile he had shed upon her when she had asked him for his help, when she had admitted and approved his love for

Heloise. Astonishingly, in quite the same fashion he now smiled at her. She hurried on. "I want now to say good-bye and to tell you how sorry I am that our delightful talks are over, that I won't see you again at the Manor. I will explain all this to Heloise."

At the end of this speech, Q rose and, with no smile, he spoke to Dr. Sales.

"You have the whip hand, doc," he said, bowed gravely and was gone.

Startled by the cool abruptness of speech and act, they stood and listened to his quick departing footsteps down the hall, across the veranda, crunching the gravel, silenced on the lawn. Then Dr. Sales, pale, moved his eyes uneasily from the curtains Q's broad shoulders had set swinging, to Miss Selda. She was bent in her chair; her head had fallen so far forward that he could see only her chin below the gray bands of her hair. Her fingers clutched the arms of her chair. They were like claws. From head to foot, she trembled visibly.

It was the acme of her long humiliation.

CHAPTER XVII

GRINSCOOMBERY

"WHAT did you do with Q?" Heloise's swift young voice flashed almost visibly across the twilight darkness of the room where Miss Selda still sat. Sunset had come and gone, the afterglow had risen from floor to ceiling and had faded out as though under a fine sifting of gray dust. The locust voices droned endlessly. There began to be a faint rustle of tired leaves as a breeze sprang up from the ruffled leaden river.

Lelo followed her first question with another, more doubtfully keyed. "Are you still here, Aunt Selda?"

"I am still here. Don't light anything. It has been so hot."

"Aunt Selda — where is Q?"

"He has gone."

Heloise stood before her aunt, trying to see more clearly the white, narrow oval of her face, which looked like a pale mask with two black holes.

"I have sent him away for good — for his own good, probably. I told him that I did not consider him an acceptable suitor for you, Heloise; that neither his birth, education, nor history warranted any pretensions of that sort."

"Aunt Selda!"

The narrow hand on the thin arm was lifted like an ivory hand on the end of a stick. "Don't raise your voice, please! Did you intend to marry Q. T. Kinwydden, Heloise?"

"But — Aunt Selda — this is so dramatic — so ridiculous. I — I had no plans at all about Q. He is my friend — I — I promised him my friendship."

"Was that what he wanted, Heloise?"

"Oh, I think so. Yes. You know what men are. They want whatever they can get, of course. But Q! I can't bear thinking what you must have done to him. And always before you've been so kind to him. He must have thought you were his friend. Why, you were — you and he — such great friends!"

"I don't form great friendships with such young men, my dear. It is kinder to check Q now than later. You won't see him again."

"I will. I must. I tell you, I promised him my friendship."

Her face, with lips and cheeks vivid as though they had been painted, grew out of the dusk to Miss Selda's vision. The girl, so cool and languid and detached, had been stung out of her indifference, dangerously stung.

Miss Selda stirred uneasily in her high-backed chair.

"You are rash in your promises of friendship, Heloise."

This recalled to Heloise Grinscombe another promise. "I think I am old enough to choose my own friends, Aunt Selda. Other girls nowadays are not kept under such minute control." She laughed angrily. "Q says you have me whip-broke. I think he means I'm a coward; I *am* a coward."

"Never be that!" Miss Selda spoke sharply.

Heloise moved to one of the windows. The breeze blew her sheer dress back against her body; the faint lingering lights of the summer darkness just revealed her, gold and white and green.

“I promised my friendship to my cousin, Mary Grinscoombe,” she said without turning, “but I have been too much of a coward to keep my word.”

Miss Selda stood up, walked to the wall, and switched on the light.

“Where have you seen your cousin, Mary Grinscoombe?” There was no sign of weakness in her voice and carriage now; she was very angry and very formidable. Heloise turned and showed a face strained with fright, and blinking, rebellious eyes.

“The day I cut Q’s wrist I took him into a house where Dr. Sales’s car was standing. And it was my Uncle Henry’s house and Mary opened the door.” The memory of that small proud person diverted Lelo from her panic. “But you don’t know Mary, Aunt Selda — she — she’s splendid!”

“She must be.”

“Truly. You’d love her. She’s so intelligent, so *bred!*”

Again, and more dryly, “She must be,” said Miss Selda.

Lelo’s temper rose. It was a Grinscoombe temper, a pampered one.

“Why should n’t she be? She’s your own brother’s daughter!”

“The daughter of a drunkard and the housemaid — he seduced.”

Heloise put her hands over her ears. She had never been told Henry Grinscoombe's history. Seeing that her aunt was speaking again, she took down her hands and, going to a sofa, sat facing her with tight lips and scarlet cheeks. So she listened to a cold, clear recital of the events that preceded Henry's disinheritance.

"Have you ever seen your Uncle Henry? One such sight ought to be enough."

"Y-yes. I have seen him. I think he's pathetic and rather — beautiful."

Miss Selda laughed. "Your cowboy has been making a sentimentalist out of you, my dear. It's just as well I have dismissed him."

"I have not dismissed him," said Heloise.

"I doubt if after what I said to him he will wait for any further — dismissals."

"Oh, Aunt Selda! What *did* you say to him?" Heloise wailed.

"Enough, I think."

Heloise smote one slim palm with a slim fist. She sat thinking and with an effort calmed herself. She seemed to dismiss Q for the moment.

"I am not sentimental, Aunt Selda," she began composedly enough. "You ought to know me better. And I never cared a penny really about Mary, until I met her. Now I can't help caring. It's a case for common justice. I have everything and she has nothing. And yet she is as close a relation to you as I am. And she's so much finer. Mary is — well, there's something great about her."

"So that you would like to play the Lady Bounti-

ful to her, as well as to Q. You have a gift for condescension, Lelo. I've often noticed it.”

The phrases stung the girl's tenderest vanities and she moved quickly toward the door. “I am going to see Mary now,” she said.

“You don't suppose I shall allow you to take the car for such a purpose!”

“Very well, I'll walk.”

“Heloise!” The narrow hands were lifted and fell, their gesture accompanied by an incredulous, exasperated note of laughter. “Oh, go by all means! A five-mile walk on a hot evening — no dinner, a late and lonely trip home! that should take some of the condescension out of you. Your temper may carry you as far as the gate. If it takes you any farther, it will make a fool of you, and that is usually a beneficial experience. You will find yourself involved in considerable discomfort, and you will do Mary a very ill turn with me.”

“What do you mean? You have never done her a good turn, have you? Never intended to do anything for her?”

“It is not your business, of course, my dear, but, in justice to myself, I will tell you that at various times I have lent my brother rather large sums through the agency of Dr. Sales.”

“You mean that Mary thinks he — ”

“Yes, that he has lent them.”

“How perfectly insufferable for her to be under obligations to that man!”

Miss Selda flinched, and Heloise, snatching up a

wide hat as she went, darted out into the dusk. Anger gave a spurring vigor to her steps. What were five miles to her trained young muscles! In Aunt Selda's youth, walking was an unaccustomed exertion, but Aunt Selda did not belong to the swimming, golf-and-tennis-playing, dancing generation with which Heloise had been trained to compete. She walked freely with a tall, lithe swing, and anger made her unconscious of her speed. She was in revolution, a red riot of revolution, and she gloried in her new sensations. She would dine with her Uncle Henry, and she would telephone to Q and see him at Mary's house. She would do the free, fine, courageous thing. What a pity she had n't thought of this before, and let Ferdinand run her into town in his machine. And, with the name, her feet faltered and her first speed slackened. She thought of Ferdinand for half an hour without pause, and the night, with its stars and its heat, the dust of the roadside, the faint rushing of the river, became the sultry surging of his passion — oppressive, exciting, dangerous, impossible of clean fulfillment. If Aunt Selda — here Heloise smiled the small smile of Sir Sydney Grinscoombe — had guessed, she would not so summarily have dismissed Q. The watch-dog had been driven away just as the wolf gathered himself to spring! Poor watch-dog! Or poor wolf! Or — perhaps — poor little lamb! Heloise laughed aloud at her own rhetorical interpretations of her predicament. She wondered what her arch-eyed cousin Mary would think of all this confusion of feeling, the deep-down, smothered, willfully ignored bitterness of a past

wound, the heat of a present temptation, the mysterious waver of her heart toward Q, who, for all his grim strength, was as clean as a mountain wind. The chained, bewildered, struggling heart of the girl stilled itself suddenly as though by mention of him she had opened the heavy curtains of the night. Q, tight-lipped, deep-eyed — he had been hurt, and she was to blame. She had trapped him. What could she do with her bad heart? So tormented youth interpreted the night to its own varying moods.

Mary, in the desperation of her discovery of him, had told Dr. Sales that nothing could surprise her. It was a rash challenge to topsy-turvydom. Life had many surprises in store for Mary, many more overwhelming, none perhaps so unexpected, as that which came to her threshold on that sultry Friday night. She had finished clearing up her supper dishes, for Heloise had fancied a dinner hour of half-past seven when the reality was a supper at half-past six. Henry Grinscoombe had wandered out into the night to make an early rendezvous with Kinwydden. Mary was alone. She was alone, and she was sitting on the top step of her narrow stairs, because here, with the door open below and a window open above, the little house drew in breaths of night air, and Mary's curls were pleasantly lifted about her ears. She wore the thinnest of worn white frocks, carefully mended and daintily laundered by her own capable fingers. She told herself that she ought to be making out Q's programme for to-morrow. She told herself that if Grinscoombery had not been Grinscoombery, she might be

flowing through the dark in a big car, like Mr. Fadden's. She decided, tucking in her mouth corners, that it would be more amazing to be loping across an endless gray-green plain with Q. These dreams hurt, but they were a sort of ecstasy. Mary's imagination was as vivid as that of most repressed and thwarted natures. She dissipated in visions. She leaned her head against the balustrade, caught her knee in her hand and half-closed her eyes. She felt the swing of the horse, smelt sage adrift across her nostrils, heard Q's companionable, brief laugh. He might put out his hand, comradely, to crush hers, because they were both so free and happy under the white light of a big western moon. If only the beat of the ponies' hooves had not counted up figures. Two dollars — two thousand dollars, they hammered, that must be paid to Dr. Sales. Or else — two kisses, two thousand kisses. She jerked disgustedly back from a big soft face and her head bumped against the railing. Some one below her was murmuring, "Mary! Mary!" She must have been asleep.

Mary stood up mechanically and came down the stairs. Grinscoombery in the person of her tall cousin stood in the doorway. Mary could not believe it until, lighting a gas-jet in the hall, she definitely made out a white, tired, laughing face under a wide green hat.

"Heloise! But you look so hot and tired!"

Heloise pulled off her hat and pushed back from wet temples the clinging golden hair.

"I walked every step of the way to see you, Mary. It's a revolution."

Mary led the way into her sitting-room, pulled down the shades, and lit the lamp. Heloise flung herself down in the wicker chair.

"What time is it?" she asked faintly. There were no signs of that late dinner.

"Eight o'clock or later. I'll get you some lemonade. Heloise, do you mean that you came to see me against Miss Grinscoombe's wishes — that you quarreled with her on my account?"

"On your account and Q's." Heloise fingered her hat confusedly and lifted eyes that were embarrassed to Mary's gentle sternness.

"But I don't like it a bit!"

With this emphatic expression Mary went into her kitchen to make the lemonade and Heloise dropped back her head and closed her eyes, fanning herself with her wide hat. It was not only weariness that made her shut her eyes; it was distaste for her surroundings. To Heloise's spoiled senses, the working-man's house, for all its neatness, was an offense. It smelled of paint, it was close; the noises of the town, grating trolley wheels, clapping footsteps, rough voices, filled it. Heloise dreaded the appearance of an inebriate uncle. Was it here that Q received his lessons? His image suffered from the association. No, she would not telephone to Q nor ask him to meet her here. How could she have planned anything so undignified, so tasteless, so vulgar? A clandestine meeting in such a room as this, under the chaperonage of such people. Already Heloise was beginning to taste the sharp flavor of Aunt Selda's prophecy. The walk

in heat and dust had taken the first fine flush of her angry impulse from her, and she was now conscious of cold discomfort. Her cousin in this stifling, shabby, tiny room was the veriest stranger. The visit was certainly a blunder in taste. She was feeling, true to Aunt Selda's suggestion, like a fool. It would be impossible to break through all the bitter years of estrangement that lay between this cousin Mary and the Manor and herself, and even if she did, would any friendship between this girl and herself prosper?

"I owe you something a great deal stronger than lemonade for making such an effort." Mary had come in, and was setting a tray with pitcher and two glasses on the table. Her presence, pretty and quiet and proud, gave Heloise back a little of her courage. Yes, Mary might be worth it, if only she could be plucked out of her surroundings, out of her past.

For the moment, Heloise was completely at a loss and sipped her lemonade in silence, affecting greater weariness than she felt.

"Please tell me, Heloise, just why you came."

"Because I promised to try to be your friend."

"Yes." Mary's smile was a smile of spontaneous brimming amusement. Her small face sparkled. It was as though she had exclaimed, "What a funny girl you are!" And Heloise felt mortifyingly like a "funny girl." She made a desperate effort to win back her sense of worldly superiority. She did not recognize the Lady Bountiful spirit with which a discerning aunt had discredited her.

"Mary, my dear, Q has often accused me of coward-

ice because of my neglect of you. Certainly you have been most unjustly treated by Aunt Selda, and I should like so much to make amends, if it's possible. I've thought about you always so much. Every Sunday, for years and years, I've walked up the aisle at church and passed you and wondered about you.”

Mary blushed. So many unprofitable moments, consecrated to worship, she had spent in bitter wonder over the callousness of that sister of her father who bowed and knelt and murmured herself a “miserable sinner,” and, “being in love and charity with her neighbors, steadfastly purposing to lead a new life,” took wine and bread with lesser sinners; the aunt who begged audibly to be delivered from pride, vainglory, and hypocrisy. Mary now felt that her inner comments on the lofty Miss Grinscoombe and the lovely, aloof young cousin, exquisitely gowned, must often have shouted themselves across the dim little rustling church.

She said to Heloise, “You could n't have imagined what a wicked, malicious little girl I was — and am.” Then, before her cousin could speak, she hurried on, flushed and proud. “You must n't feel any weight on your conscience about me, Heloise; that is n't just. None of the trouble has been your fault. You could n't be expected to break through the Grinscoombe traditions, for I suppose, in a way, that is what has stood between us. I've had a name for it” — here she glanced half-apologetically, half-slyly, a trifle hopefully, perhaps — “*Grinscoombery!*”

Heloise opened her green eyes wide and looked po-

lately dazed. "Grinscoombery — !" The two girls were silent, the word seemed to grow between them a tangled hedge of misunderstandings, differences. Heloise wrestled with her bewilderment and — yes — her offense, and Mary, looking at her as above a magically growing hedge, understood conclusively that the splendid revolution was a failure. It hurt her — for Heloise. She wanted to console the gallant adventurer. "You have been so sweet," she sighed inadequately, "I am so grateful to you. I don't want you to quarrel with your aunt — "

Heloise, still faintly bewildered, tried to brush away that word, but all through the remainder of the interview the troubled preoccupation it had provoked made her eyes sad and absent.

"I have had everything" — she made a measured confession — "and you have had nothing. I reminded Aunt Selda this evening that, after all, you are as much her niece as I am. To do her justice — Mary — for I did accuse her of downright cruelty and neglect — "

"To do her justice — ?" Mary prompted.

"I suppose I am betraying a confidence — but it is only fair to us — to Aunt Selda and me — "

"Fair to Grinscoombery," thought Mary, but had already learned to keep it a thought.

"To let you know what she told me. She told me, Mary, that, through Dr. Sales, she had given your father assistance more than once, to the amount of several thousands, I imagine. She fancied you would prefer to believe it came from Dr. Sales, and perhaps

she was right. I've never liked Dr. Sales. I don't quite know why. Perhaps because I think Aunt Selda is far too submissive to him — But, Mary, what is the matter?"

"Nothing. I'm just putting my hands over my eyes. They — feel a little weak."

Heloise rose uncertainly.

"Perhaps I'd better go. You are tired. I wonder — " She drifted toward the door.

Mary came quickly after her. She was now smiling. "I think you've been splendid. I'm honestly grateful, Heloise; my friendship will not be worth any sacrifice to you — "

"Since I chose to be your friend — !" Heloise spoke proudly, but it was, nevertheless, a hollow attitude, a hollow speech.

"It's quite enough that you did choose." Mary was firm. "The impulse that brought you here was the desire to overcome what you like to call your cowardice, to vindicate your courage to Q, to prove your independence of your aunt, and to do me justice. Well, Heloise, you've done all this. And I want you to let it be enough. It will always be to me a splendid recollection. I like it. I do like it, yes, I do, in spite of my ridiculous pride and temper. But you see, Heloise, **your** friendship can't include Papa; mine can't include your aunt. We can't be free in our intercourse. Can you come here and visit me? Can I go out to the Manor? It's all unfortunate, unnatural. This sounds very cold and — repellent, I'm afraid. It's not your fault, nor mine. It's" — she drew a great breath, as

though pulling the word up by its own weight — “it’s Grinscoombery!”

Heloise had put on her hat. Her face was cool and smooth now, if a trifle pinched about the lips and nostrils. She looked curiously like Aunt Selda. Her eyes tried to meet Mary’s, but slipped uncomfortably through their uncompromising challenge. Mary sadly enough put out her hand.

“Thank you so much. Good-night.”

Heloise spoke uncertainly in a faint, sad voice. “Good-bye,” she said. It was a blank admission of failure. Grinscoombery had definitely claimed her for its own. “May I use your telephone?” she said, as though to a stranger. “I think I shall get a taxi to take me home.”

As she stepped into the taxi, a thought of Q smote Heloise and a sharp pain went through her body near the region of her heart.

CHAPTER XVIII

SOWING THE WIND

IN the cold blood that followed the failure of her more romantic impulses, Heloise decided that she would take it for a sign that by Q's dismissal Fate meant that she was to drink the heady potion Ferdinand offered her as nearly to the dregs as safety might permit. Deliberately, therefore, she postponed her message of reassurance to Q until after her next meeting with the more dangerous man. She could not know, because she lacked imagination and had an untrained sympathy, just what this intentional reservation of loyalty would mean to Q himself.

He had suffered greatly at Miss Selda's hands; this in spite of a shrewd comprehension of her act; but no such suffering could equal the slow disillusionment his heart endured as it waited in the bare, blazing hotel bedroom all the long next day for a message that did not come. He would not go to school that day, so hungry was he for the reassurance, so certain was he of his lady's loyalty. He did not come down to lunch. At four o'clock he came out of his room as nearly a devil as can well be imagined. To this grim, white, and dangerous devil, Sophie tremulously addressed herself.

She had been coming along the red-carpeted, dingy hall that looked like some long dragon's gullet, and she had been hurrying, fixed eyes and a white face,

dressed for a journey and carrying a small bag in her hand. When Q stalked from his door across her path she, startled like a thief, stopped, flamed with some change of blood, and came doubtfully close.

"Oh, Mr. Q," she said.

He stopped and looked down at her with ice-gray eyes, and, as she met them, her own widened in a frightened fashion and she put a hand on his arm, found it iron and trembled back.

"What's the matter? Are you angry with me? What've I done?"

He spoke roughly and thickly. "Nothing. Get on with what you meant to tell me."

She twisted the beseeching, rejected hand into its fellow; so strait was her own predicament that it made her ignore his unaccustomed harshness. "I'm not going to stay here any more," she said, looking from side to side. "I'm scared, if I do, that I'll get married to Jonas Benton. Now that there is n't any hope at all" — her beautiful long throat above the shabby collar of a thin blue serge jacket moved as she swallowed violently — "well — what's the use! What's to keep my courage up, anyway, against those two always plaguing and quarreling and threatening? I'm going away."

"Sure — what's the use!" he said. "Might as well get out. Sluypenkill ain't the whole world. Good-bye."

With a grim effort of his will he forced himself to take her hand. It was very cold, and that fact faintly reached his imagination. Her eyes clung to his as

though they wished to tell him some desperate truth. She said in a whisper, "Good-bye," a whisper that acknowledged a faint hope of which his manner had deprived her, then she went on along the hall, her hand holding to the railing of the stair-well. She moved very slowly now, though, before Q came out, she had been walking in hot haste.

"I've told them," she murmured, "that I was going to shop." She started down the stairs.

Mechanically, Q came to the well and watched her. The habit of sympathy cannot be broken in an instant. His own mood of reckless deviltry, the beastliness of his smothered intentions, made her actions readable to him. He was remembering in a cold, impersonal fashion that he had seen her at least twice in close conversation with that smart, insolent, good-looking drummer who got even with God by laughing at his fellow-men. Q knew that drummer type remarkably well, its noise and insolence and tawdry, soiled emotions, the towns of his West were infested with loud-mouthed cheerfulness and whispering, salacious gallantries. Why would Sophie be hobnobbing with that fellow? Because all women were cheats and fools? Or because, being turned out of her heaven, there was no place left for her hurt spirit but hell. The man had a motor, too, or at least had the running of one in the interests of his salesmanship. It would mean for Sophie a quick getaway, a quick and complete escape from her intolerable treadmill of drudgery and persecution. A picture of Laurie's sensitive face, keen, quick, and haunted eyes, boyish

crop of curly red hair, his struggling look, pierced Q's hardness, and on that instant, as though his thought called, Sophie, faltering down the steps, lifted up her eyes to him once. Q sprang after her down the stair, passed her and turned about, barring her way.

"No, you don't, you Sophie gel," he ground out softly through set teeth. "You go back and lock yourself into your room while I go down and beat up that smiling feller to a pulp."

Sophie, red as fire, cried out passionately, "Let me by!"

"No, ma'am. You go back."

She turned white. "You have nothing to say about what I do. I'll go where I please, with any fellow I please. Who cares? Let me get by!" Then, with a look down and a triumphant, pale smile, "Father's coming up. If you don't get out of my way, I'll scream."

He, too, glanced down over the banister, and saw that in fact Sophie's pimpled father was slowly mounting the flight just below. He, out of the line of vision, had not as yet seen them on the stair.

As Q moved back from his swift inspection, Sophie put her hand on him to thrust him aside, and it needed only this touch to bring his devil of thwarted, wounded will into violent action. He reverted rapidly to type. The trammeling garments of civilization fell from his spirit. So often life had brought him face to face with the necessity for physical violence. While for months now he had been tilting with windmills of vague, op-

posing forces, here was a concrete will pitted against his. With one great gesture he caught Sophie up bodily, his arm across her mouth, pressing her head against him, and ran back with her across the hall into his own room. She was now fighting like a tigress, both of them primitive, passionate, released. Holding her with one hand, he sought in his closet, found his rope — of course he had brought it with him, for he could not possibly have imagined a place where for so long there would be no necessity for its many-sided usefulness — and, like an act of wizardry, with a turn here and a jerk there, he bound Sophie with the maximum of security and the minimum of discomfort into his largest chair. During the few seconds that it took him to perform this feat, he had kept hand or arm across her mouth and, at the last, producing from his pocket a beautiful large silk handkerchief, he made of it a soft, effectual gag, and stood back. His face gleamed, happy, masterful, triumphant.

“Now, you Sophie gel, you set there quiet and easy till I come back. Nothin’s going to hurt unless you pull ag’in’ the hitch. Then it will hurt plenty. It ain’t the first time I’ve roped a gel for her own good. I stood over Ma Shippen’s daughter with a gun all of eight hours, atalkin’ to her most of the time too, and her swearin’ at me. I ain’t agoin’ to do no talkin’ to you. I’m agoin’ to herd in another feller who can talk better. Good-bye, gel. You’re pretty comfortable, ain’t you?”

Her great, astonished, shining eyes made him laugh. He bent down and kissed her head, then ran

quickly out of the room. She heard the key turn in his lock.

So quietly and expeditiously had this deed of violence been accomplished in Room 90 of the River Hotel that Q, stepping out into the hall, met Sophie's father just arriving on the fourth floor. The head waiter regarded him with stony disfavor, a prejudice started the day of Q's arrival and since then busily fostered by a jealous suspicion of the Westerner's unconventionalities, and his simultaneous attentions to Grinscombery and Sophie. Now he thrust out his paunch and breathed fast as Q addressed him.

"Your daughter left a message for you," he lied suavely. "She said she'd gone out to buy up the town and would n't be back until late — no more dish-washing for her until to-morrow — savvy?"

He smiled at the fat, small man's helpless perturbation and went past him lightly and swiftly down the three flights, across the lobby, past an unsuspecting Benton, and out on the pavement, where he hailed his friend and instructor in the art of running a Ford car.

"I want you to spur your critter and get me to West Lemmon on a high lope," he said, and the delighted mechanic pushed and pulled and turned and bounded away from Main Street on a blaze of dusty roadway toward the west.

Q, jerking and swaying physically, thought steady and straight, distracted from his own pain. He knew that in this mission his tongue was his one available weapon and, of all others, he most mistrusted it. He

was no talker — silence had always been his tool. But now he must at once and forever convince a man, by words, of Sophie's need. It was heaven or hell for Sophie, and only this one man could turn her back. It was, at top speed, an hour's journey to West Lemmon. The dusty Ford poked its nose into the elm-shaded, broad-streeted, pretty town at half-past five, and Q, inquiring the way to Dr. Laurence Sales's office, reached it a few minutes later and found that the doctor was not at home. He would be back, however, probably in half an hour. The assistant wondered sympathetically if it were the thought of dying wife or child at home that drove the tall, bright-eyed visitor to and fro across the floor of the waiting-room. She ran out across the pavement and caught Laurie by the arm as he stepped from his automobile. She was usually a quiet, prim little soul, but Q's lightning had struck her into vitality. “Oh, Dr. Sales, there's a desperate man in there. He's been waiting for half an hour. He's so grim and pale. He keeps muttering to himself — I think it's some sort of swearing. Do hurry, please!”

Laurie looked startled, smiled and went in, being hurried through the hall by the excited woman. He dragged a jaded body and a dulled spirit into the office, and opened his folding doors, conscious as he did so that there was in him scant sympathy for a new need. There came Q, to meet him, and drew him in and shut the doors with his own hand.

“Sit down there,” said Q, pointing the young doctor to his desk chair and standing over him, tense,

forceful, charged with urgent feeling. "You hev told me before now that I ought to learn to mind my business. Twict I've made a fool of myself afore you, and I swore I would n't do it no more. Well, I won't. It ain't no fool business of rescuing a lady that don't want rescuing this time. It's a real, honest, desp'rit girl, and I hev left her shut up in a room lest she go to the devil, and that's the truth, doc, on my honor."

Laurence stared up at him, tired eyes not yet sure that they were not justified in warm amusement.

"There's a cold-eyed, thin-lipped devil of a salesman back there at the River Hotel. A feller like him back in Sugar City onct made love — that's what the dirty —— of a —— called it — to a soft little gel, a biscuit-shooter, and after he had quit her she quit livin' by the free use of a revolver ag'in' her throat. She wrote a letter to her ma sayin' as how she felt too bad to go on livin' because the way he'd used her had sort of cheapened everything, and life looked dirty to her. Notice, it was n't what she'd done that was drivin' her out of the world; she could have lived that down; we'd have helped her and the baby, if there had been one; but it was the *way* he'd used her. Well, this feller at the River Hotel is the same sort. He's a grand looker, fine clothes, neat face, pink lips, big eyes, laughs a lot, finds folks funny. He's got a machine. Sophie was on her way to him" — here Laurie stood up slowly and faced Q across the desk — "at about four o'clock this afternoon. She had on her best hat with a flower in it, and kind of a thin little blue suit, and her face was white as paper, and she

was carrying a little old bag in her hand. She run ag'in' me and she told me good-bye. Listen now, doc, this is the rest of what she told me. 'I'm not going to stay here any more. I'm scared if I do that I'll get married to Jonas Benton. Now that there isn't any hope at all' " — it was extraordinary how Sophie's very tone quivered in Q's low, drawling voice — " 'what's to keep my courage up against those two' " — she was speaking of her pa and Benton, the long, pale old feller, that means to sell out his hotel and marry her — always plaguing and quarreling and threatening her. So she told me good-bye and started down the stairs, and it was right there I began thinking about the drummer — and you. You told her you was going to marry another lady?"

Laurie, breathing quickly, said "no" fiercely.

Q's eyes gleamed. "She thought you was, I reckon. She'd fought about long enough, and she was hell-bent on going to her drummer. I got atween her and her intentions and she tried to shove me out of the way. Her pa was rising steady as cream from the lower story, and she said she'd holler, so I picked her up and took her to a room, and there I've — persuaded her to wait. She don't just know what she's waitin' for, doc, but I was hopin' it might be — for — you."

Laurie had sat down again. His hand on the desk was fisted. He stared unseeingly at Q. In the past fortnight Laurie, too, had been tilting with wind-mills. He had broken with a relentless damsel of much social importance, and his world had been hurting him, though not so sharply as his heart, which had

twisted him powerfully back to his old love. He, too, was tired of repression; the romanticist, the adventurer, was on top; his spirit leaped to meet Q's challenge.

"They tell me you're a first-rate doc," went on the Westerner, as quietly as he had spoken from the first, "and that you're ambitious in a place where the folks think a lot of education and manners and such. Well, sir, I know places where a doc is needed like you need God in hell. And where a feller like you that wants to make a big name and a pile of gold has only to walk in and write a perscription, and where a woman like Sophie would be a queen. Doc, there's a city grown up like a mushroom overnight; it's an oil city, and it's named Kinwydden, after my little old ranch and me. I hev got some say about that city, and it's full of my friends, and if I send a doc out there with his wife, the men and women and children in that place will throw up their hats into the air. Say, they'll mount horses and Ford cars to meet you and lead you in percession to the finest house they can pick out. They want a doc. West Lemmon don't know how to want anything like they want you. I knowed right away at first sight of you that you was a real man, like I knowed Sophie was a real woman. You sure like to be free to love the girl you want, and to live the life you want, and to be a great man in your own way with a free heart. Kind of way down somewheres you want adventure, don't you? Quit doctorin' a lot of nervous ladies and come out to my city. You'll make a real name and a real fortune

there, Laurie, and by God, you'll have a real woman to help you do it. Can I take you back?"

"No, Q, you can't take me back, because I've got to operate on a case to-night. But you can take back a letter from me to that 'Sophie gel' — and — look here — next week I'm going West."

CHAPTER XIX

REAPING THE WHIRLWIND

THE "Sophie gel" stayed perforce where Q had left her, and her astonished senses gradually composed themselves. She had been snatched up out of her own purposes as by a whirlwind, and constrained to an objective contemplation which, in a few dizzied moments, showed her the fairly volcanic abyss she had escaped. Nights of tossing, aching sleeplessness, days of relentless persecution, pain of heart and bitterness of personal failure — for she had believed that Laurie's love would need only a sight of hers for its renewal — such hours and such pangs and fears, tuned to a monotony of work in kitchen and dining-room, had jangled the girl out of her dreams, and it is precisely when such habitual dreamers are so rudely waked that they embrace prompt disaster. Her attempt to educate herself, to reach up to Laurie, having failed, all that was vulgar and commonplace in her inheritance and circumstance threw her back violently upon such consolation as the salesman's glibness had to offer. Not good enough for Laurie, she was at least good enough for the handsome Rupert Seaman. The wife of a Benton would scarcely prove a less damaged vessel than the adventuring heroine of the drummer's romance. That enchanted forest of which poor, exquisite Sophie with her startled eyes was a born denizen, was no training-school for the

main street of Sluypenkill or for the lobby of the River Hotel. When a prince had alighted at her door, Sophie was ready: the prince having thrust her out of fairy-land, she fell against a ragged and sordid reality with all the violence of her rejection.

There is a theory abroad that goes by the precious name of realism, and which dogmatically asserts, in many diverse ways, that the mole on a lady's cheek is more real than the dimple; that, to be honest, one must pluck the wings from a butterfly and make notes on its crawling powers; that marriage is a matter of morning yawns rather than midnight kisses; that life walks attentively beside the gutter and not along the front of palaces; that, in short, a man's big toe is of infinitely greater moment than his craving for beauty. But surely, whatever chances and changes mortify and afflict our physical lives, the life of our thought may always be a journey of enchantment. If we work in a department store and travel thereto in a subway, clinging to a strap, nevertheless, we remain eternally seekers of buried treasure; if we wash the baby's underclothes and make its bed, Mary, the Madonna, must have done no less; yet what we remember is that she "carried His sayings in her heart." Perhaps a baby's first recognizing smile is melodrama, but it is at least as real as his colic. All of which is to defend a predilection. A realist would doubtless find greater profit in watching Mrs. Huggs cleaning her doorstep than in watching Mrs. Huggs weep with her broken heart. She did both daily. And Sophie, washing dishes and blowing tears from a reddened nose, would be

more convincing than Sophie wandering in a land of faërie "where no birds sing." To such realists, in fact, the telling of a tale must forever remain a sheer absurdity, for what makes the chronicle of a Q or of a Sophie significant is not the acquiescence in circumstance, but the rebellion against it. When Q caught Sophie in his arms and roped her to his chair, he was acting more simply, naturally, and inevitably than when he constrained himself to use Bill's services with the "buzz-box." The ascent and descent in the elevator remained always to him a romantic and astonishing adventure. He understood far more readily what Sophie had been about to do and her reasons for doing it than he understood Heloise's deliberate sipping of Ferdy's temptation while she held her rescuer off until such time as the poison began to take dangerous effect. The ways of mental experiment were to him indeed bewildering, but physical adventure was the very breath of his being. Following his instinct, he would, in one riotous, satisfying week, have beaten up Dr. Sales, mopped up the lobby floor with Benton, held up Miss Selda for a fat purse for her brother and niece, shot Ferdy through the head, married Laurie to Sophie at the muzzle of a gun, and galloped off with Heloise before him on his saddle. Of course, this is what, in the course of a six months' struggle, he was trying to do. Condense his time limit to a week and you will have the untrammelled man at work. But Q was not a superman, and convention, the cold weight of circumstance, had their ropes upon him.

Sophie was the first victim of his unleashed sin-

cerity. She sat, feeling in body the weight of his hands, the constriction of his rope and scarf, and the quick, laughing touch of his lips on her forehead, and feeling in spirit a beatific release. Life had been taken out of her hands, and she realized that she was profoundly tired, that her nerves were stretched almost to the breaking point. Coercion was a rest. She relaxed in the chair, leaned back her head, and, through half-closed, still astonished eyes, wondered what was to become of her. Q would go to Laurie, was on his way. Would he rope him and carry him back and lay him at her feet? She was seized with sobbing laughter so that her breath shook against her bonds. Her heart swelled, tears fell from her eyes. Q was her god. She could have followed him to the world's end. She would now have kissed his strong, gentle, constraining hands. She was safe, silent, hid from persecution, from passion, from ugly opportunity — love's prisoner, a prisoner of hope. Would Laurie come? Leave that to Q! She looked at her shabby little leather bag, caught up by the whirlwind that had caught her and now rolled over on its side in a corner of the room, and she wondered quiveringly how she could ever have packed it for so mad a purpose. To be lifted forcibly and tied up was a marvelous clarifier, it would seem, of one's imagination. Here she, Sophie, sat — safe, sane, and clean, waiting for her love, when, by now, left to her own will, she would be traveling through the dust in Rupert Seaman's car, with his arm about her and a sick, hot memory and dread of kisses. What hardening of her imagination, what disassociation of

her very personality had left her free to such intentions? Rupert, by now, had gone off, alone and angry, to console himself with less uncertain adventures. The sounds of the street rattled and hummed across her dazed consciousness. Below her, Mariana Benton stepped here and there from closet to bureau, getting herself ready for her evening off. Now she had pulled up a chair. She was probably preparing to curl her bang. Sure enough, a scorched smell presently drifted in at Q's window. Sophie waited, wishing that she could get rid of her gag, which was beginning to be very uncomfortable. She would not cry out now; Q might have trusted her. She began to work with her tongue and lips and jaw to loosen the scarf. My, but he was clever at tying a person up!

Mariana, below, went out of her room and banged the door. She would be going out, thought Sophie, with her young man, the drug-store clerk. Mariana had always been shrewd and sensible and kind, even to a prospective stepmother. She had a vast amount of philosophy, that curled, manicured, indifferent being. There would never be a folly in Mariana's life — nor a flight. Sophie watched Q's curtains trail sluggishly in and out across the sill. The smell of scorched hair persisted. Mariana must have all but burnt off her bang. There followed upon the smell a wisp of smoke; some blackened fragments drifted across the open square of sky. Sophie straightened a little in her chair and stared at the whirling black bits. They looked like burnt lace, pieces of a lace curtain. Another and denser scarf of smoke was sucked in at

the window. It had a certain heat. Something was burning down below in Mariana's room, her curling-iron heater attached to the gas-jet, left burning near the window curtain on the bureau — that was it — Mariana's curtains must be on fire. And Mariana had gone out five minutes ago. Sophie thought dazedly that she ought to give an alarm.

The alarm was given by a small boy in the street who, five slow, queer minutes later, shrilled out, "Fire! Fire!" That cry took a sharp stitch in Sophie's heart. The hotel was burning. Inside, along the hall, she could hear running steps; outside, the street began to hurry, to clatter, to hold an increasing panic of foot and voice. Just below her was the heart of the fire and here above it she was tied and gagged. She began to struggle and that, true to Q's warning, tightened the hitch. It hurt. But even if it did hurt, hurt to agony, she must get free, must scream, must attract help. She could n't just sit there, could she? and be burned alive, while Laurie was on his way to her? Oh, how the cords cut and seared like flame! It would feel like that when the fire reached her. There was a terrible tumult outside in the street; inside, people were running about. They came to Mariana's room. The door was smashed in. There followed confused shouting; the smoke went up past her window in big black clouds full of whirling sparks. She could not fight Q's hitch now; it was cutting her wrists to the bone and tightening horribly across her chest and about her knees. But the gag had loosened. In her hideous increasing panic she could not make

out the cries and shouts, only she knew that the clamor was growing. Yes, there was the frantic, outrageous growing cry of the fire-engine. Here the gag slipped and Sophie, flinging herself convulsively back in her chair, shrieked and shrieked and screamed aloud, "Oh, help! Help! Help! Save me! I'll be burned alive!"

By the time Benton and Sophie's father, with a fireman's help, had broken open the door of her prison, Sophie was entirely incapable of reassurance. They untied her, while they swore, sick with anger at what they saw, and she fought them with all her strength. The fire, they told her, was out; it had been nothing worse than a burning curtain; they begged her to explain her plight. But she could neither understand nor explain anything. She had to be held down on Q's bed by her father and Bill, while Benton ran for Dr. Sales.

After his deed of lingual valor, Q mounted his taxicab and went back to Sluypenkill at top speed. He had a letter from Laurie in his pocket and his fancy pleased itself with a vision of Sophie's reading face. He compared the probable happy issue of his adventure with that other masterful beneficence concerning "Ma Shippen's daughter." "If I was only as good at rescuing me from myself as I am at rescuing ladies from themselves, I'd be a right successful feller," he decided, and sadness steeped his face, his body relaxing on the cushioned seat. That strong, confident will of his tightened its grip on his aching heart. He

had been “hurt bad” by Heloise. She had “sure done him in,” but in spite of her, he would win out. He would break her proud, high, cold, and willful heart to his tenderness as he had gentled the mad-eyed broncs to his control. There had been moments when her eyes had been the eyes of girlhood, sweet, frightened, unawakened eyes; faltering — and held by his. He would believe those eyes even when the lips denied their loyalty. He made an effort of faith that was almost physical, crudely he believed in a sort of magic; defeat came only to those that believed in defeat. There would probably be a message from Heloise waiting for him at the hotel, and he would have suffered all day from an unnecessary pain. So impatient was he to get the message that he only noticed without any impulse to inquiry that there was a ragged remnant of a crowd about the front of the River Hotel, small boys and dogs, still hopeful of a renewal of the splendid chance of a conflagration, and he sprang up the steps, through the glass doors, and half across the lobby before he noticed Benton drawn up near the foot of the stairs and obviously challenging him. Then, with an abrupt hardening of nerves, Q stopped, eyes narrowed, and face grim. The man before him was changed with hatred, his sallow, oval countenance worked, and malice possessed his lack-luster brown eyes. He came close to Q and whispered into his face.

“You come upstairs with me and see what you’ve done — before we turn you over to the authorities.”

Without a word Q followed him into the elevator,

and was more startled by Bill's wild pallor and avoiding eye than by Benton's unaccustomed belligerence. He allowed himself to be gripped by the arm in Benton's cadaverous hand and led to the door of Room 90. From inside came a monotonous sad murmur, broken by little startled cries of protest.

"Her father's in there," said Benton, "and Dr. Sales. He's been working over her, but we can't get any sense out of her. She's clean out of her head." He ground his teeth and spoke between them. "Perhaps you can explain."

Q stepped quickly into the room.

At his entrance, Sophie's father looked up from a frightened contemplation of the girl, and Dr. Sales rose from a chair near the bed. Benton locked the door and placed himself against it.

Q moved to the foot of the bed and bent his eyes upon Sophie. He was white and scared.

"What happened?" he asked in a nervous whisper.

Dr. Sales was spokesman.

"You would probably have got away with it, my man," he said, "if there had n't been a fire in the hotel. The curtains of Miss Benton's room just below this one caught fire. There was an alarm and — your victim, naturally fearing that she would be burned to death, was frightened out of her wits. She had managed to get rid of your ingenious gag and she screamed for help. After a while her people here located her cries and, with the help of a fireman, broke down your door and found her in this terrible condition. Her wrists — as you see" — he lifted one of

Sophie's hands — “are cut almost to the bone; her neck is raw where the rope burnt her. But of course the worst result of your brutal handling is to her nervous system, perhaps to her mind. We have n't been able to get a sane word out of her. We insist now, sir, upon a full accounting from you.”

Q faltered to Sophie's side and bent over her. He was shaking from head to foot; all his splendid composure and aplomb had left him.

“You — Sophie gel,” he urged and put his hand beseechingly upon her.

She stared up at him from wild eyes and shrieked out, “Don't let him hurt me!” He shrank back and was further propelled by the head waiter, who, darting round the bed, struck at him with two frenzied fists. Q threw up his head. He had a dazed look. But behind the brilliant pain and fright of his eyes, his brain was working coolly now and carefully. He must n't, of course, betray Sophie's attempted indiscretion; he must n't tell about the drummer. There was really no explanation he could give. She was in no condition to read Laurie's letter, nor could he trust any one of these three guardians of hers to read or to deliver it. As usual, he had only the old familiar weapon — silence. Holding back gently with one hand Sophie's infuriated father, and looking quickly from one to the other of the two men, he drawled out reasonably.

“I ain't blamin' you at all, gentlemen. It's jest the way I'd feel myself. I hev sure made a fool of myself, maybe worse. I can only tell you that it ain't any of

it her doin's. It was a fool experiment of mine with nothin' bad back of it — jest plumb childishness, but you don't want to believe that, naturally. So I ain't expectin' you to. You keep your hands off'n me, because I don't want a row, and tell me what you want me to do. Keep rememberin' that, for the gel's sake, you'd better make as little excitement as possible. I could n't feel badder 'n I do right now, if that helps your feelin' any, and I'll do anything you say."

"First," spluttered Benton, "you get out of my hotel and don't show your dirty face here again."

"I thought you 'd sold your hotel, Mr. Benton."

"G— d— you! Don't talk back to me. Until the new owner takes possession I'm in charge here and — *you walk out!*"

"Yes, sir, and quite right. Next." And he turned to Sophie's father.

The pimpled waiter was breathing short and hard. "Damages," he snuffled, "that's all I gotter say. Damages." He pointed to the girl, lying quiet now under the effects of a narcotic. "You may of ruined my gel for life. You gotter pay."

"Yes, sir. That's fair too. I'll pay. And now — doc!"

Here his calmness froze to something that was both ice and iron. He drew closer to Sales. The big loose figure held its ground and answered softly.

"I'll see you outside, Kinwydden. I believe it would be altogether unwise for you to leave Sluypen-kill at once. Some version of this story is bound to get about the place. You see, the fireman helped to break down the door."

For the first time a fear of the consequences of this escapade to himself and to his own plans smote Q and flushed his whiteness.

"Sure. You'd see to its gettin' about in its best clothes, would n't you, doc?"

He glanced once at Sophie and went out into the hall, followed by Dr. Sales. They faced each other in the hallway.

"I shall certainly see that the story reaches the minds of any one here who might otherwise be inclined to admit you to their acquaintance, Mr. Kinwydden." He paused, his hands sliding across his waistcoat; his small, spark-like eyes snapped. "As I once warned you, I have run two young men already out of Sluypenkill."

Q seemed not to have heard him. "The — the Sophie gel — will get all right?" he faltered, and Dr. Sales, smiling faintly, turned the screw.

"If she does n't die in convulsions, she will recover physically, but I doubt if she ever gets back her poor disordered wits."

Q leaned against the wall, his hand over his eyes; his forehead slowly was covered with fine small beads of sweat. "O God, that ain't the truth, doc. I know you hate me like a rattler, but I want you please to let me off on that. It ain't the truth."

"As far as I know, it is the truth. Your methods are a bit too rough for us here in Sluypenkill."

"I ain't agoin' to put my trust in you," said Q. He said it twice, like a prayer, a sort of litany. He felt for Laurie's letter in his pocket and then moved blindly toward the stairs.

"It is entirely owing to our consideration for the poor girl's good name, you understand, Kinwydden, that we are allowing you freedom from physical restraint. I hope you understand that you are not to be allowed to remain any longer in this place." Suddenly he became venomous. "We've had enough of you."

"I better not quit, had I, until we know how the Sophie gel gets on?"

"Perhaps not. If she dies — "

Silence. Q stood straight, like a soldier waiting for execution.

"You may be wanted for manslaughter. Hush!" — for lightning had passed through the tall, lissome figure — "they're bringing the girl out of your room. You will want to go back for your things."

The door of Room 90, in fact, had slowly opened, and between them, the head waiter and Benton carried Sophie along the hall. Dr. Sales and Q stood to see her pass, a peaceful, silent, broken figure.

CHAPTER XX

SANCTUARY

RUMOR's tongue quickly took up the tale. It hardly needed Dr. Sales's liberal assistance, so fast it spread through all the ranks of Sluypenkill society. Q, moving over that very night to Mrs. Stopper with his bag in his hand, was met at the door by a nervous, quickly breathing woman who brushed away at an imaginary crumb. "No, no, Mr. Kinwydden, indeed I can't let out a room to you. I know I told you I had one and I'm real sorry, but it is n't possible. Not that I'm ready to think evil nor give any heed to scandal, but that when a story comes direct to you and — did n't I always say that it could n't be done — not in civilized society, calling on Miss Heloise Grinscoombe at the same time and all. It's really too bad. It will bring Miss Selda's pride down to the dust and I'm not saying it won't be a wholesome lesson, but my business is to support the columns of society, Mr. Kinwydden, and kind as you were about Sweetie and a pleasant visitor, I don't owe you any obligations — Oh, are you going like that without a word?"

Q paused on the step and looked back at the excited little figure. The street lamp lighted it dimly from in front and the electric bulb in the hall more brilliantly from behind. It looked under the two lights a solid small body enough, resisting radiance. As Q looked, Sweetie bounced out of the house and

ran between his legs, came back to rub against them and purred in an emphatic key. He picked it up and, smiling, handed it to its owner.

"I don't know rightly what I can say, Mrs. Stopper," he murmured, "except that I thank you for your cake and tea parties."

"Then you can't explain any of it? Perhaps I could take your story to Miss Grinscoombe."

"No. But thank you kindly. I was a plumb fool, and I look like a plumb villain, and it can't be helped — not for the present. I'll pack my stuff elsewhere" — he hesitated — "or perhaps I can leave it here and come back for it when I've located a good camping-ground."

"Why, Mr. Kinwydden, I don't know what to say — people seeing it there — as they say — actions speak louder than words and it might lead to inquiries or talk saying that I was renting a room to you — "

"I savvy. Good-night to you, ma'am."

She came half-across her porch, frantically brushing at the imaginary crumb. "But I'd be the first to welcome you back if the clouds roll past, Mr. Kinwydden," and doubtfully she added a "Good-bye."

"Oh, it ain't good-bye," he said from the gate, which he had just reached. "It's just good-evening," and he went swiftly down the street.

It was eleven o'clock when he came to Mary Grinscoombe's door. He was still carrying his bag and his shoes were dusty. The door stood open and Q, setting down his burden, stepped in and came to the

threshold of the tiny sitting-room. Directly before him, blocking his path, loomed Dr. Sales.

"I might 'a' knowed," said Q, and turned to go.

Dr. Sales moved back across the room and disclosed Mary rising with a flushed face and startled eyes from her low chair beneath the lamp, and little Mr. Grinscoombe peering above fitted finger-tips. Q saw the small, familiar room suddenly through a blur. He made out an instant later that Mary was standing in front of him, holding out her hand. He took it with a quick, wordless gasp.

Then Sales spoke.

"Mary! Mary!" he said, and clacked his tongue.

Mary turned from Q, keeping her hand upon his arm, and threw the concentrated brightness of her face upon Sales.

"You did n't really think Papa and I were going to turn Q out, did you?" she asked, "because of the story you've just been telling us? In the first place, I'd have to hear his side of it; in the second place, I don't turn away a friend when he's in trouble."

And "Good-night, William," said Henry Grinscoombe, speaking suddenly from Mars.

Q spent that night on the wicker lounge where he had once endured an operation at the hand of Dr. Sales. He spent the night as one spends one's blood, drop by drop, a night of never-to-be-forgotten misery, during the long, slow hours of which he thought only of Sophie. He went over with terrible painstaking every detail of his dealings with her and cursed their clumsiness, their brutal ineffectuality. Hith-

erto, experience had taught Q perhaps a dangerous degree of self-reliance. He had learned that in emergencies, the body, of instinct and promptly, does the one safe and necessary thing, so, like most men of action, he had been early freed from imaginative fear of events to come. Here in this more complicated world his faith had failed to justify itself. Yielding to impulses, he had acted, blindly and foolishly; absurd or fatal results had followed his actions. He had hurt other people. Perhaps in truth he was now a murderer. He remembered a man he had shot out there, shot him necessarily in self-defense. It had been bad, but he had never sweated over it like this. An agony of remorse and nervous dread tormented his nerves. He sat up once or twice gasping like a little boy in a nightmare. If Sophie were dying now —! If she were mad —! He clutched at the pocket containing Laurie's letter and, remembering his vision of her reading face, he put his head down on his arms and wept. Early daybreak, before Mary had stirred, brought a letter to the door by the hand of a stray messenger. It was addressed to Kinwydden in a flowery, shaded hand.

You are hardened enough, I know, to be careless of most consequences, but when it comes to bringing real disaster upon the lives of people that have signally befriended you, I can't help hoping, in spite of evidence to the contrary, that this appeal may have some consequence. Your reputation in Sluypenkill having become overnight an evil smell in the nostrils of the community, you may imagine what an effect your presence in Mary Grinscombe's house will have upon her life and reputation. You can go back to the

West, but she must necessarily stay here. Believe me, you are doing her terrible, irreparable injury.

SALES

Q hurried back from the door, which he had opened, got hastily together the few articles he had scattered about the sitting-room, sat down at Mary's table, and wrote a few lines.

Thanks to you, ma'am, and your father, I have passed a comfortable night. I will see you again when the clouds roll by — as Mrs. Stopper puts it. If I have made mistakes in this writing, it is because I feel pretty bad about not seeing you to tell you my story. I will come back and tell you the whole truth. Don't you put no faith in doc. I am not telling you good-bye.

Q.

This he folded and set up in a conspicuous place, and, lifting his bag he went out into the wan and empty street. And this time, wearily but with certainty of a welcome, he turned his face toward the Grinscoombe Mill.

CHAPTER XXI

THE VOICE OF RUMOR

DR. SALES straddled below the portrait of Sir Sydney Grinscoombe and visibly exulted. He swelled out chest and stomach, blew up his cheeks, and let the sparkle of victory snap from his eyes. His voice could not constrain itself to soberness; its usual flowing surface was vivaciously rippled.

"I won't say 'I told you so,' though I might! You turned out your protégé in the very nick of time, Selda — the very last nick — if the figure will pass." He chuckled happily.

Miss Selda's face looked as though it had forgotten happiness. She held her stiff pose and her stony gaze with a strained effort. There was no evidence in her skin or lips of blood; some thin and acid fluid filled her narrow veins.

"Then in some way since the day before yesterday Q has justified your opinion of him?" There was a note almost of anxiety in her impeccable, dry speech.

Sales struggled against a smile, managing to purse his soft mouth judicially, the whole outer man a visible medium for the antagonistic modelings of sincere emotion and of hypocrisy. "He has indeed! A pity! All that romance of the West. Heloise must be told."

"What must Heloise be told?" The girl's voice announced her entrance, an ironical young voice and a languid intrusion which took her only halfway to-

ward them, and left her poised for an immediate departure. What Sales told kept her there, however, and flushed her pink from the lace collar of her gown to the smooth dark gold of her hair.

"Q was run out of the River Hotel yesterday, and every door in Sluypenkill is shut against him. I believe" — a chuckle broke past his control like an escaping gnome — "he has found a refuge with a drunken mill-hand, a man you dismissed some time ago by my advice, but who has since, for some reason or another, been taken on again."

"I took him back at Q's request. The man had lost his wife and had a family. He stopped drinking."

"Well — well! — To go on, Q does n't dare run away because he knows such a move would lead instantly to his arrest."

"What are you talking about, Dr. Sales!" Heloise cried out sharply.

"About a very serious scandal, my dear, not really fit for your ears, but, unfortunately — a necessary warning."

Heloise moved angrily.

"Last night, Q was put out of the hotel for an abominable attempt upon Sophie, a waitress. There was an alarm of fire, the curtains in the room immediately below Kinwydden's caught. There was a great deal of confusion and alarm. In the midst of it, Benton heard a persistent and terrified screaming for help. He and the head waiter traced it to Q's room, which they found locked on the outside. With the help of a fireman they broke down the door and found Sophie

roped, if you please, in the style of Western melodrama to Q's biggest chair and gagged with his silk handkerchief. She'd managed to work her lips free from the gag and was beside herself with fear. She must have been pretty well man-handled, for she was in dreadful shape, clothes torn, hair disheveled, wrists cut to the bone, and out of her senses, hysterical. They called me in, but we could n't get anything out of her. Kinwydden, returning from some hurried expedition — he probably meant to take Sophie off with him last night, perhaps he was out after a drug, I wish we'd searched him! — and knowing nothing of the fire, walked calmly into Benton's clutches and was brought face to face with his victim. I've never seen so abject and cringing a rogue as he looked — all the bravado turned to fear. He refused to explain. Of course, they're trying to keep it quiet for the girl's sake. They pitched him out of the hotel — personally I think they ought then and there to have locked him up, but Benton would n't have it. They thought they could keep the whole story quiet, which of course they can't. He'll probably try to sneak off. Well, ladies — a nice story, is n't it?" Somehow Sales found himself unable to look at Heloise, a side glance having showed her so white and still. "So much for the romantic West!"

He managed to smile regretfully, but Miss Selda could not return the smile. She had a broken look and sat back in her chair. She was remembering Q's eyes.

"There must be some mistake. Sophie must explain. Perhaps there's a good reason for his silence. Is the girl better? Can she talk?"

Sales flushed deeply and angrily. Her unexpected defense irritated him. The spark-like eyes, however, shifted with some uneasiness. "I am keeping her under a narcotic at present. For a few minutes this morning she was quite herself, but I could n't allow her to talk. It would have been dangerous. Besides, she offered no explanation; seemed rather dull and desperate. Poor child! I'm afraid, Selda" — he dropped his voice — "that it was the sort of terrible unspeakable experience that can never be described. He's a savage brute."

"Perhaps," murmured Miss Selda, her hand across her eyes, "he will marry her. Has she any family?"

"Yes, a father, the head waiter, a respectable old fellow, quite heart-broken."

"Has he tried to do anything, I mean, to arrange — "

"Oh, they can't do anything until they've heard Sophie's story. But she won't marry Q; not a chance. She shrinks at the mere mention of his name."

Silence followed, during which a maid delicately intruded to place Miss Selda's mail in her hands and then withdrew, her eyes betraying curiosity. Heloise took advantage of this interruption to escape. She was still white, but bore herself daintily, as though she were a creature aloof from sordid realities.

Miss Selda glanced absently down at the letters in her hand and became at once electrified. She rapidly tore open a dense white envelope. When she looked up from this, it was with the smile of Sir Sydney

Grinscombe. She caressed the letter with long fingers; the stony self-possession had returned in force.

"You were quite right, William," she said. "I admit it. It was foolish to imagine that the young man had any intrinsic merit. One is too prone to fancy that a rough stone must necessarily be a rough diamond. I suppose Heloise has had quite a miraculous escape from some unpleasant day of reckoning. My fault entirely! I let down the bars for a reason — which, luckily, has now" — again she stroked the letter — "ceased to exist." She smiled slightly. "He was an amusing creature. He might have been useful. Perhaps he was." She dismissed him with a gesture and, rising, walked over to her desk and put her letter very carefully away. Then, turning, "We can all forget about him now, William. He was always, for some reason I could n't quite fathom, a thorn in your flesh. I wish Fate could remove some other thorns as easily."

"From my flesh?" William rather uneasily replied, his hands at their seeking motions instantly.

"Yes." Miss Selda hesitated, standing with a hand on her desk. She looked cruel. "I was going to send for you this — morning in any case, after church, which I see we have both missed."

"You were going to send for me?"

"Yes, about an absurd, perhaps an alarming incident. This paper I found lying on my floor this — morning. It had been weighted with a stone and tossed in through my window. It has to do with you."

She took a crumpled sheet from her dress and handed it to him. Sales read and whitened.

We are going to get rid of William Sales [he read]. If you don't chuck him from the hospital staff and publish your reasons for doing so before next Monday at four, we are going to take the law in our own hands. It will go hard with Sales. He is, in the eyes of God, his own conscience, and our judgment, a murderer.

This was signed, “Widower.”

Sales read and stared at the bold round signature. His indolent memory dimly bestirred itself. He fumbled with his ghosts. “A widower?” Clinton's wife who had died of lock-jaw in the ward — they could hardly get him for that. Nobody could know — least of all the slovenly head nurse he had retained in office — that he had n't properly sterilized his set of instruments, taking a chance because it was late and he was dining out. Perhaps it was the big Blain woman. No, she had been a widow and her case would n't have creditably borne inspection from surviving relatives. Stay! There had been a midnight call, on a stormy night, last spring. Some woman at the Gully — a bad heart! He remembered now the voice of the summoner. “It would n't do you no good to know my name, doc; I'm a stranger in these parts. But the woman is took awful bad. Say, doc, you better come.” Why, that voice had been Q's. Sales had never linked the disassociated incident — the voice, drawling, incredulous, urgent, through the wet night — now startled him vividly. Sales wondered why in God's name he had n't tumbled out of his bed to obey

that summons. He remembered that he had been half-dead with sleep and he had said something about a rabbit-warren, something outrageous.

"You're badly frightened, aren't you, William?"

Miss Selda's tone had a poniard's point.

"Of course not!" he exploded instantly. "What nonsense! The fools that write such letters are the least fearful beings in the world. Cowards and liars!" His big face was blotched; he began to move about, ponderously quivering. "But you've got to do something, Selda. On my word, you have" — he was suddenly a leering bully. He rolled his head at her. "You don't allow such a letter to influence you, I hope." This was a threat.

"You have brought such letters upon yourself, William," she returned with a quivering courage. "How can I protect you forever from yourself, your indolence, your ignorance, your criminal neglect?"

He swelled, his big face copper-colored. "You — you — you! What haven't you to fear? What can hurt me as you can be hurt — by me?"

At this she walked rapidly and stood beneath Sir Sydney's portrait, her trembling hands clenched on the edge of the mantel. It seemed almost as if she looked to that old contemptuous symbol of Grinscoombery for help.

"Oh, don't," she cried out pitifully, "don't dare to speak like that. I — I — of course I'll do all I can. You know it. All I can. What else have I done with my life but use it for your ladder, your shield! It's been *long* — my life! Please get back to your own

house now, William. I want to feel again that *this* is mine.”

He laughed all shakenly and discordantly and fumbled his way through the gold-colored curtains to the front door. He was a very different figure from the one that had rolled in triumphantly an hour before.

Miss Selda, beneath Sir Sydney's sneering portrait, wept. She wept proudly, her body shaken against stern repression. Gradually the stillness soothed her, the sound of church bells, irregularly regular, shaking dim music across warm roofs, hay-fields, and drowsy August woods. She became gradually aware of footsteps in the house, across the floor above. That must be Heloise. The poor girl was unhappy; the steps had a driven and tormented sound, terribly shocked by the disillusionment concerning Q. Poor, wild, beautiful, distracted thing! Miss Selda drew herself together and dried her eyes and cheeks. The exquisite suffering of youth — how she envied it! — the adorable sweet pangs of hope and of despair, the throbbing of blood like a savage, monotonous beating of tom-toms, an inherited rhythm of desire. She was wistful over her child, her one tenderness. Well, she must let the girl fight for a brief while longer; how splendidly the plot was working. What success! If she had misshapen her own life, at least she had saved Lelo's from deformity. And Q — he had helped just long enough. There was a certain irony in that. Civilization could so easily bend simplicity to its purposes and then so lightly discard the instrument. Poor Q! Poor boy!

The telephone rang in the hall, a maid's feet tapped and went upstairs with a message. Heloise's restless pacing stopped. She was going slowly over to her own telephone upstairs. Miss Selda waited. She heard low, emphatic answers, a little reckless, staccato laugh. She recognized the tone as that appropriate to Ferdinand Fadden. What a nuisance! Miss Selda suffered from a plebeian temptation to listen over the downstairs telephone, a temptation which the trained censor of her consciousness cut dead as though he had not even recognized it. The conversation upstairs was lasting an interminable while. There was evidently some sort of argument. The final sentence rang clear through an accidentally opened door. "Of course, then, I'll come. That will prove that I'm not afraid of you. Good-bye."

Miss Selda started away from her attitude of tense listening, seated herself at her desk, examined the contents of the heavy envelope for an address, and began to write brief, urgent sentences with the not quite steady fingers of a need.

CHAPTER XXII

MISS SELDA CALLS FOR HELP

Q HAD never heard of the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune," but he solved Hamlet's propounded problem — instantly, without any faltering of wits. He took arms against his sea of troubles. First, he decided, it was urgent to get Laurie Sales's letter to Sophie at the earliest moment permitted by her recovery, which, he assured himself, allowing for the elder Sales's spite, must be a matter of a few hours' rest and care. A severe fright the girl had no doubt suffered, and coming on top of a long strain and a violent emotional reaction, it was enough to put her into hysterics. But Sophie was a particularly healthy woman and did not belong to the class whose nerves had been indulged by fretful introspective idleness. She would come quickly back to normal. But she ought to get her letter. It would be an efficacious remedy for the depressing cures enforced by Sales, Benton, and her "Poppa." Q, in his factory-house refuge, meditated the intervention of Mary Grinscombe, but, remembering her former disapproval of his interference in the affairs of Laurie, he decided against it. After all, he might just as well deliver the confidential message himself. Benton and Company could n't be forever on guard; it would take three or four of them to throw him out. They "would n't likely" call in the police. Miss Mariana had always

been his friend. Before he had come to an end of all the excellent reasons for putting his plan into practice, he found himself ascending the dingy steps of the River Hotel. Five minutes before, Q's observation had informed him that Benton had gone out, it was the hour of the head waiter's necessary absorption in dining-room duties, Sales had gone his rounds, and was probably now taking a siesta in his inner office, Miss Mariana would be at the desk, Bill in or near the elevator.

Q ran up the steps and strolled across the lobby. He said, "Good-mornin' to you" pleasantly to Miss Benton, and stepped into the elevator.

Bill wavered in the doorway, looking over his shoulder for instructions, and was pulled in. Q slammed the door.

"You lift me up to Sophie's floor, feller," he murmured gently, "afore I start shootin'."

And the elevator slowly rose. Bill's expression was beatific, though wan. Drama had come at last into his life.

"Stop where you are until I come back — savvy!"

Q, speaking grimly over his shoulder as he stepped out, received a multiplied nod.

"What's her room?"

"Down the hall, Number 25," Bill breathed out, his nostrils working like small bellows.

Q ran to this door and knocked. "You — Sophie gel," he said.

She cried out softly, and he came in, closing the door behind him. She was propped up on her pil-

lows, all her dark hair spread about her and her eyes alight. He stepped over to her. “You ain’t scared of me, gel?” and his voice shook. “You know I’d ’a’ been drug by an outlaw bronc afore I’d ’a’ done you any hurt.”

She nodded; instantly her eyes were hungry for the letter in his hand.

“I’d have told them,” she said, “but they won’t listen. They say I must n’t talk. And” — with a deep rose-hearted blush of humiliation — “it was so awfully hard to explain — about Rupert. I’ve been sick over you, Q. I’ve been furious about the way I acted. I was scared to death because of the fire, but I did n’t mind what you did — ” She laughed uncertainly. “Somehow I can understand you, and you were right. It was exactly what I needed. I came to with a jump. Oh, Q, think where and what I’d have been by this time!”

“Quit talkin’, dear. Look, I’ve got a letter for you.”

He put it into her hands and turned to go. But at the door he could n’t resist looking back. She was reading her letter, her face glowed, she had already forgotten him. He went out, smiling.

Bill, very solemn now, took him down.

“Say,” Bill hissed between the second and third floors, “I’m for you, bo, all right. I’m wise to Sophie and that drummer-boy. Give me a new job and I’ll split on her and quit.”

Q’s eyes widened for an instant. “You hold your tongue, Bill,” he said, grinning. “Stick by the buzz-

box. Likely you'll get a raise higher than the sixth floor. Tell 'em I stuck a six-shooter under your floatin' rib. They'll believe it. Good-bye to you."

He bowed again to the rosy and blinking Mariana, who had spent the interval in staring at the elevator door, rejoicing in Q's good looks and dashing behavior, and wondering whether it was her duty to call Sophie's father and ring for the police — and so ran out and down the steps. So much for the Sophie gel! A vast weight had fallen from his heart. It left it free to feel the keen ache of Heloise's desertion. Before he reached his room under the flat, red-hot tin roof of his refuge, he was white and his lips were drawn. He had walked the dusty roads all afternoon trying to out-distance pain. How could he quirt himself into an acceptance of defeat? He had sworn to Sir Sydney Grinscoombe that he would win that girl. All her beauty swam before his senses as he sat bowed on the edge of his iron cot. The room was darkening, for it was late evening, and against the dimness Q's weary eyes painted the pictures of his desire. Presently he closed them and fell back across the bed, throwing up an arm over his face. He was down, but he was fighting, only, this time, it was himself.

"Oh, Mr. Kinwydden," a child's nasal voice whined at his door. "Oh, say, looka here, Mr. Kinwydden, now, you're wanted at the telephone."

He came to his feet, startled, and felt his way to the door. The room was very dark; the cloudy August night seemed to clog all his senses.

"Where did you say, Kitty?"

“Downstairs in the hall, mister, right clost near the door. The gas-jet’s lighted — you’ll see.”

“Sure. I savvy. The telephone.”

Q descended two narrow flights of uncarpeted stairway and put a greasy receiver to his ear. The voice sent a shock along his limbs. It was a quiet, even voice, choosing its syllables precisely, but it was the voice of panic.

“Is this you, Mr. Kinwydden? This is Miss Selda Grinscoombe speaking. I found out from the Mills foreman where you were. Mr. Kinwydden, you once made me a promise.”

“Yes, ma’am,” said Q. His voice was the counterpart in sound of chilled iron. Even across stretched wires, the voice must have given warning, for Miss Selda’s tones hurried unevenly.

“Now you have a grievance against me, perhaps a just one — ”

“No, ma’am, I knowed you were n’t responsible,” he said, and caused a short silence.

Then the hurrying voice began again; it was frankly pleading.

“Q, I need your help, desperately. My child, my little Heloise, is in terrible danger.”

He waited; the gas-jet showed his unrelenting mask.

“She has gone off with Fadden — oh, I hoped it was just for an evening spin, but it’s worse. He has dared her to risk herself. They — they were bound for an inn in the mountains,” she gasped heavily, audibly. “It’s called Folly Inn. It is not a respectable

place, Q. It is absolutely secluded, remote, inaccessible. Out there he will have her in his power, and I happen to know that he is angry with her. I have telephoned the inn, but they don't answer. Q, are you listening to me?" she wailed; he could hear her strike the telephone table with her clenched hand.

"Yes, ma'am. I'm hearing everything you say."

"It's now half-past twelve, and they're not back."

Q did not move an eyelash. Miss Selda, when she next spoke, was weeping.

"Heloise would be here, if she could. I feel her terror. I feel her crying for help — for your help. Q, whatever grievance you may have against me, she has no part in. Heloise believes in you."

"I'll be at the inn in about forty minutes," said Q. "I know where it lays. I can get a car here pretty quick by means of a friend who has the running of his own machine. I'll leave him here and speed the animal myself. I learned how to stick it, more or less. Quiet, lady, quiet! Good-night to you."

He hung up.

A road, once traveled by Q, was mapped indelibly in his memory. He was very trail-wise. He could have followed the wandering lanes to Folly Inn with a blindfold over his face. This was nearly what he had to do that night, for it was a night of solid darkness through which the Ford seemed to be jerking a passage for itself. The owner of the car had given it to him with reluctance; damages must be assured; he expected the complete destruction of his means of livelihood. In fact, a more desperate venture than

Q's that night could hardly be imagined. He knew far less about the car than the average modern small boy. He did erratic things. His course was alternately a crawl and a bound, and it was almost invariably serpentine. At regular intervals he stalled his engine. He struggled up hills with his brake on and plunged down them with it off. At last, by dint of "giving the animal its head," and going at a shaken, undiminished, breakneck speed, he solved most of his problems, and went leaping like a madman through the night.

CHAPTER XXIII

AT FOLLY INN

WHEN Heloise, witch-like and swift, had left Q to face his punishment at the hands of Sales and Miss Grinscoombe, she had meant to run back to her dangerous game with Ferdy in the garden. This intention had taken her rapidly down the steps, more deliberately along the path between the high hedges, and had faltered suddenly at sight of Ferdinand himself. She had paused just where he was visible around the corner of her shelter. He was leaning meditatively forward, fishing for a cherry at the bottom of his tall, narrow glass, and his teeth showed between his smiling lips. It was this smile that gave her heart a wrathful twist and sent her presently tiptoeing back between the hedges to the house. Let him sit there and smile until his smile had time to fade into an astonished blankness. Why was he, after all, so sure of her? He must fancy that, because she trembled, she loved him! No, that was not the name for the excitement he proffered her. She had learned to recognize, at least, what it was *not*. In her room upstairs she watched at her window, saw him fidget in his chair, look up at the house, saw him move about. The sunlight faded from the gay canvas umbrella; he was a white and solid figure in the dimness. She fancied she heard the short oath with which he presently jerked his big angry body away and flung it into his

limousine. He did not look up at the house. His broad young shoulders were sullenly squared under his thin coat. Heloise laughed between her fingers like a naughty child. Lesson the first for Ferdinand! And their next meeting would be, after this set-back, thrilling and dangerous enough. She would be cool, no more shaking; she was done with her shaking.

When, on the Sunday morning, the maid called her to the telephone, and she heard his voice, she reined in her nervous excitement with both the hands of her will. Only a few minutes before, the watch-dog had been utterly disqualified for office. Dr. Sales's story of a waitress and a fire had stung the girl's Grinscombery to rage. Sluypenkill, perhaps New York, would get hold of the story and drag her into it as Q's alternate distraction. After all, why should she need protection? She had always been able to take care of herself. Ferdy had, of course, once narrowed her world to the grip of his arms, and she had been able hardly to draw in her breath, but at her first word he had released her.

"Are you shaking this — morning?" Ferdinand's voice through the telephone fell suavely on her ear. "I think I can hear your heart beat over the wires."

"It's your own heart, Ferdinand. I never felt less like shaking in my life."

"What's given you back your nerve?"

"I never lost it."

"Then it was n't because your protector was called off that you never came back Friday afternoon?"

"Of course not. Don't laugh. I insist upon your

believing me, Ferdy. Why should I be afraid of you?"

"Why, indeed?" he asked.

"Did you call me up to tease me about my lack of nerve — ? Because I have other and better ways of spending a Sunday morning."

"On your knees, eh? I'd like to see you before a prie-dieu under a stained-glass window like some little medieval saint. You'd be pretty and convincing — almost. Heloise, my precious hypocrite, I don't believe one word you say. You did n't come out to me again because you were scared to death. Remember, I saw your hands shake, and you told me you'd sent for Q. You're a short sport, Lelo."

"Am I? I'd like to prove it."

"You can do that easily enough." There was a pause here, filled with the quick humming of their invisible medium.

"How?" she asked. She felt as she had often felt on the hunting-field before the getaway. Her heart had begun its smothered beating.

"By coming out and having supper with me tomorrow. Will you do that? I'd like" — here he was humble and rather sweet — "to prove to you that I am a gentleman, Lelo."

"Where would we have supper — you mean late supper?"

"Oh, no — say eight o'clock, at an inn, a jolly little old quiet place I know of back in the mountains. We'll have supper there and come back by moonlight."

“There won’t be a moon, Ferdy.”

“Damn the moon! Then there’ll be stars — if not, there will be your pretty green eyes, Lelo. I’ll be have beautifully and so will you.”

“Of course.”

“And we’ll swear friendship on the inn Bible in the front parlor. It’s like that. Well” — he sighed and managed to convey a sneer — “you *are* nervy, are n’t you?”

“Oh, I’m coming. I was just wondering about Aunt Selda. She would n’t like it — a little bit.”

“But you don’t always consider that interesting detriment to a good time so carefully.”

“N-no.”

“Honestly — don’t you trust me, Heloise?”

“I don’t,” said Heloise with a profound and genuine bitterness, “trust any one, least of all myself, Ferdinand. I have pinned my faith on the honor and sincerity of two men who have both quite conspicuously failed me, and — forgive me, please — they were quite certainly much more promising specimens of chivalry than you are.”

“Just shows how bad a hand you are at experimental psychology. Are you coming to supper?”

“Of course I’ll come. That will prove that I’m not afraid of you.”

“I’ll be at the Manor at seven o’clock sharp.” There was something hard, a quality of decision in his voice that she had never heard in it before and that kept her attention focused after he had hung up, as he did immediately. Ferdy’s voice was usually soft,

either sweetly or sullenly. That last speech had a business man's incisiveness, the tone of some one who has put through a successful deal.

Heloise spent the interval of time in a sort of vigil preparing for a final triumph over her tiger cub. One must never show fear to these pet wild things. She would be marble inside and ice outside, and withal the pleasantest possible companion. She would be both lion-tamer and woman of the world. She would be Grinscoombery incarnate. How that foolish word of Mary's adapted itself to her thoughts and filled what must have been a need. Who was a Fadden upstart, when it came to that, to disturb the tranquillity of a Grinscoombe? She was great lady to her finger-tips when she came down the steps to Ferdy's car that Monday evening.

"What is the name of your inn, Ferdy, where you think we can get supper?" she asked, just before she stepped into the seat beside him. He had not yet looked her in the face, but now he did, but with opaque eyes.

"Folly Inn," he answered, and smiled.

She looked toward Aunt Selda, standing at a window like a tall, austere medieval saint, disapproval incarnate, and she was faintly startled to see a white, distorted face move suddenly from her sight. At the same instant Ferdy started his car and Heloise, looking back, could not decide whether or no Aunt Selda had run out, unbelievably swift, upon the porch.

They talked very little on their leafy, dusky way to Folly Inn. Ferdy seemed absorbed in nursing his car

along the rough hill roads. He was paler than usual and had a look which Heloise described to herself as “swept and garnished.” Had he really, perhaps, driven out his pampered devil? Had her little lesson of neglect really tamed him? The wicked girl was conscious of a pang of disappointment. She felt flat. Life was a tiresome and disappointing business at its best or worst — a shabby affair, unworthy of her steel. True love had been timid and uncertain, chivalry had stained its shield, passion was a diluted wine. The only possible solution was some cold compromise with life such as Sir Sydney with his wedge-like face must once have made and kept, too, cynically, with that small, set smile.

The shabby inn received them into its shadows and Heloise’s youthful curiosity responded to the adventure.

“What a quaint place! Why have n’t I ever heard of it?”

The little smiling, sidling proprietor took her wrap softly away and softly pocketed a fistful of something which passed from Ferdinand’s hand to his. He went back to his counter and, when the two handsome guests — the only visitors — were seated in their small inner room at the daintily set round table, Derrek quietly made his preparations for an undisturbed night. The dark young waiter had his instructions for attendance, the cook knew what she was to serve, there was nothing for Derrek to do save, smiling a little, to disconnect his telephone and to point out to the waiter this small action, with a lifted eyebrow and

a murmured word. The old man had been carted upstairs to bed at sundown. Now Derrek locked up and went up to his own room. He slept immediately above the small company.

Heloise was charmed with her surroundings. It was all quaint and smelt sweetly of roses and old cleanliness and care. The floor was pleasantly uneven, a tiny fire snapped in the grate, for this room had been damp, and up in the hills after sunset, the night had a faint, insinuating chill in its suddenly cooled sultriness.

Ferdy was a persuasive host. They drank to their adventure in the cocktails he mixed. Heloise talked amiably over their soup and their cutlets, their hot biscuit and sweet corn, their ice-cream and apple pie. They lingered interminably over coffee and cheese and crackers. Ferdinand was an excellent listener that evening, only he seemed to be listening to the inn and to the night as closely as to her.

"I admit your nerve," he said, as she left the table to sip from her small cup before the fire and the high, narrow mantel shelf. "Have n't you ever really heard of Folly Inn?"

He wandered round the table, now cleared, stopping for a second at the door before he joined her and stood beside her across the uneven brick hearth. The room was almost too warm with its closed shutters and its fire. The mirror told Heloise that she was brilliantly flushed; red and white and gold. She had taken off her hat and wore the sheer black dress she had chosen for its graceful dignity. It made her skin a substance of electric fairness.

Ferdinand looked at her delicate bare forearm resting along the mantel.

“No,” she said, “I never heard it mentioned.”

“It was once quite a famous little place. Some of the rarest, choicest Hudson River scandals have been hatched here.”

“Scandals!” Her coffee-cup rattled as she set it down. “Why, you said it was the sort of place where there ’d be a Bible.”

“As a matter of fact there is one, over on that table. Do you want to hold it in your hands, Lelo?”

“Oh, no — I don’t feel the need of Bible support. You’ve never cooed so mildly, Ferdy.” She affected a delicate yawn. “You’ve been almost — boring — for once in your life.”

“My wife tells me that for a large strong man, I’m fairly ineffectual.” He was still looking down at the arm and Lelo was aware of the unchanged direction of his look and the slowly changing expression of his face, from which a curtain like the curtain of a stage was lifting gradually.

“She does say rather nasty things to you, does n’t she? Poor Ferdy!”

“Yes. After you didn’t come back to the garden, I went home in a bad humor. It was d——d rude of you, Lelo, to leave me there, and I had an unholy row with Lucy. She told me she was at least more successful in her affairs than I seemed to be in mine. She told me that you were making me look like a great fool — and act like one.”

“Does she consider me one of your — affairs, Fer-

dinand?" Lelo examined her fingers to be certain that they were entirely steady and not cold.

"Don't *you*?"

"No."

"Just — no — like that?"

"Just — no — like that!"

"I saw you on Saturday round the corner of that hedge. You came back and looked me over and went away and left me to sit there and cool my heels, did n't you? You thought me the kind of puppy-dog that puts up with that sort of kicking — did n't you?"

Heloise had a swift, revealing memory. "Seems like she entertains the notion that a man is a safe little pet animal like some kind of a lapdog. I'm not a quarter so safe. Some day that lady is agoin' to get the lesson of her life if she don't quit temptin' me —" It was n't possible, perhaps, that she, Heloise Grinscombe, had, in Q's terribly candid phrase, been "tempting" Ferdy for the beguilement of her bitter, disappointed tedium? Was it a dangerous game? Could it be that a man was really not, when it came to the final development, a safe plaything? Was this sipping at passion the proper medicine for the restless craving of an unsatisfied desire? Ferdy's physical strength, the hot intemperance of his blood, his obvious desire for her, had been a stimulant, a distraction. Perhaps — she came to the decision suddenly and completely — she had better go home.

"It's been charming, Ferdy," she smiled and moved around the table languidly.

“You’re not going home yet?” he asked politely, standing, however, still where he was.

“W-well, it must be very late. We ate like epicures and I’ve talked my head off. Aunt Selda will be getting very nervous about me.”

He laughed shortly and inexplicably as she reached the door.

“I can’t open it,” she said.

“Queer!”

“See if you can, Ferdy.”

He tried obligingly and failed.

“There’s something the matter with the catch.”

“Um-hum.”

“Call the waiter.”

“Oh, he goes back to his own wife and family after hours.”

“The proprietor, then.”

“He’s in bed. I heard him turn in about an hour ago. He’s snoring sound asleep by now.”

“Well, then, break open the door.”

“Not on your life,” said Ferdy roughly, and then she turned and looked him over carefully.

“You are going,” he said heavily, “to be punished so you’ll never forget it.”

Heloise crimsoned.

“Punished? For what, please?”

“For making a fool of me, my dear.”

“If you are a fool, Ferdinand, it was never of my making.”

“Are you afraid of me?” he asked.

He seemed to be swelling before her eyes. He

looked very handsome, rather pale, his eyes thunderous and bright.

"Not in the least. I am amused."

"Good! Then come back and sit down before the fire. I want to talk to you."

"Certainly."

She did sit down and stretched out her slenderly slippered feet to the small glow. She rested her calm hands on the painted wooden arms of her chair and looked, not at Ferdinand, but down at the fire. You must never show these fierce pets that you are afraid of them. If Aunt Selda had known her whereabouts, she would have been telephoning by now. Ferdinand sat down, too, and folded his hands together.

"You see, Heloise, I knew you did n't really love me a lot. You did find me rather — well — exciting, did n't you?"

"Sometimes. I always thought you were a good sort, that is, I always knew you were, Ferdy." In spite of herself a little note of pleading had crept into her cool, young, steady voice.

"Oh, I am a good sort, all right. And a good sport. What did you think I was after?"

"You were after?"

"Yes. I don't waste my time, generally speaking."

"I thought that was the main business of your life, Ferdy. Honestly I did."

"Well, you're wrong. I'm a hunter."

"A hunter?"

"Um-hum — like your Westerner — after big game. I've a d——d rotten married life, and I can't escape,

because Lucy does n't give me a loophole, and she won't get rid of me as long as father's money holds out — you bet. Lucy is one grand little spender.”

How insufferably vulgar he was! Lelo flagellated her own tolerance of such a man. And she had so much more rigorously kept Q in his place. Ah, Q! Where are you? How could I ever have believed anything against you? If you tied up Sophie, it was for some ridiculous chivalrous intention that Sluypenkill could never, of course, interpret wisely. She would write to Q. She would bring him to the Manor. Those guarded eyes of his that sometimes opened to show a deep, wild, gentle heart — she was thirsty for their coolness!

“Excuse me, Ferdinand, I was n't listening. What did you say then?”

“I said that you're a d——d intelligent woman and that you know me from A to Z, inside and out. You knew I was n't a romantic cowboy or a gentlemanly suitor. You knew I was — hungry for every inch of your beautiful body, that I wanted to kiss your lips so that I could forget they were n't part of my own lips, that I wanted to feel you under my hands — ”

“Hush! Hush!” She had stood up, freeing herself from him, for he was on his knees and had wrapped his arms about her slenderness.

“No, you can't run away. It's too late. You've got to give me something, Lelo, to-night, or I'll never let you go. Give me something, dear! Dear! Dear! Why are n't you generous? Anything so beautiful ought to be free as God's flowers! It never harms a

woman to give — it helps her beauty, it eases her heart. Don't make a beast of me by struggling. Come to me graciously! You will be none the worse for it — ”

The words and sentences were revealing, terrible to her innocence, which, even with all her folly on her head, all her half-knowledge, all her rashness, all her near-experience, was, after all, so astonishing a thing in contrast to Ferdinand's misunderstanding of it. The little, breathless, wind-flower, wide-eyed girl that lives, ignored and secret, in the breasts of so many of these steel-armored, flippant young Bacchantes of ball-room and motor-ride, now stood frozen with dismay and heard the worst of love before she had ever heard its best — if there be in the confused torrent of sex and spirit any best or worst, save in our warped interpretations of them. Certainly, for Heloise, there was a worst. With her training, with her background, this experience was already a brand across her mind. What it might be before she escaped can hardly bear thinking of. And yet, how could Ferdinand have looked through the affectation of a Cleopatra to the little wide-eyed, wind-flower girl? Only such bewildered eyes as Q's, used to long distances, could recognize her. Shy and sweet and wavering, she had run out sometimes to look up at him.

Ferdinand, at her growing terror and rigidity, began to be angry. He stood up, let her go, went roving about the room, pleading and threatening, coming closer to gather her persuasively against his heart, releasing her, at last dropping his mouth upon her neck.

"I'm going to drink you down like wine," he said.

And she screamed piercingly, just as though talons had been buried in her flesh.

Upstairs Derrek thrust his head under the covers and cursed. "Now, that ain't what I took the money for," he said. "Confound young Fadden! I thought she looked like a proud one. He's a nasty big animal." But Derrek kept his covers wrapped close about his ears, because the inn had very little custom nowadays and Fadden's fist had held a bundle.

With the scream, Grinscoombery's pride fell, and Heloise raved and wept and fought. She did n't hear the crashing of a shutter, but she did know at last that cold air blew upon her and that the tiger had been plucked away. She heard Q say, "Yell for your Popper now, Fer-dee-nand, like you did in the cow-camp," and she saw a battle of young gods.

It was a terrible, beautiful spectacle, from which she drew away to the farthest corner of the room, but which she watched like one of those white, gold-haired women of German forests, torn and disheveled, her eyes phosphorescent, splendid, with fury and delight. When Ferdinand lay, dead dragon under St. George's foot, she crept forward and fell against Q.

"Please take me home," wailed the little girl who would never again be a white wind-flower, for all Q's timely rescue. She was burnt with kisses and with gripping hands.

All through the dark, shaking, plunging journey, neither Heloise nor Q spoke by a single breath. She lay against him, silent, broken, sobbing at irregular

intervals in big heart-broken sobs. He lifted her down at the Manor door and she crept across its threshold, and he, hearing low voices in the other room, drew her quickly through the gold curtains and switched on a light. The little room looked astonishingly prim and gilt and undisturbed. Sir Sydney smiled. For a minute Heloise drooped below him, then she came two slow steps over to Q where he stood, somber, pitiful, and white, his bruised face quivering. She put her arms about his neck and tilted back her face, which offered the reward of victory.

“If you think I am fit — please kiss me, Q.”

He shook. With a scared, pale look he put an arm carefully about her and bent his lips. But she trembled to his kiss and clung, and slowly fired his blood. She was, for the moment, his.

“What does it mean, Heloise — your giving me your lips?”

“It means anything you like, Q. You may have — everything, anything I can give you.”

He kissed her again so gently that he did not hurt her mouth, and he moved quietly away.

“I’ll have to tell you good-night,” he murmured; then in front of the gold curtain he shot up to his splendid height, his deep eyes lighted. He moved them from Heloise to Sir Sydney Grinscoombe, and he smiled. It was not his old smile, but it gleamed.

Heloise looked upon a disillusioned conqueror.

CHAPTER XXIV

JUSTICE

AT Q's command, "Quiet, lady, quiet!" Miss Selda had faltered away from her telephone and, moving back to her chair, had dropped into it and relaxed all her trembling muscles. Since she had overheard, by a mere chance, Ferdy's and Lelo's destination, she had suffered indescribable torments of memory and of alarm. There was a long battle with her pride which set her calmly at the lonely dinner-table and took her as calmly to an apparent reading of the newspapers, which kept her chained to the rigidity of her usual composure until midnight. Then, quite suddenly, Miss Selda's self-control snapped. Thirty-nine years ago at Folly Inn! To-night at Folly Inn! Her Heloise! She went to her telephone and began a patient searching through the night for Q. By the time his voice came, hers was almost beyond her control. Not until she had his reassurance did she understand what the hours of suspense had done to her. She felt bone-broken and nerve-stretched. She sat and let old age coil round her like a snake. Let Lelo be brought back safe and she would be old comfortably!

There was no ringing at the front door, which stood open, but some one blundered heavily through it in a blind, bat-like haste and pushed open the drawing-room door upon her privacy. She turned her head and saw William Sales — white, puffy, disordered, breathing fast.

"Selda!" he whispered, coming over to her and wiping sweat from his face repeatedly, first with one hand, then with the other, "I hold you responsible for this!"

She had pulled herself up straight in her deep chair and was clutching its arms.

"You hold me responsible — for what?"

"They're after me. You've got to keep them out."

Her relief was so great — she thought he had come with some terrible tidings of her niece — that she laughed. "Who are after you?"

"Those dogs from the Mills, sicked on me by that Western devil of yours. Why didn't you do something? You could have fired the lot. I tell you, they're after me. I got a warning from a kid I've given pennies to; came on a run. They're coming, they're on their way" — he quivered all over — "with a horsewhip!"

"Coming here?"

"No, to my house. But they'll track me. He will. He'll drag me out — the bloodhound. He's been at my heels since the first night. He'll get me."

"No, William, he's not with them. I know where he is to-night. Be quiet, please. Sit down. You've been badly frightened. But I'm sure it was a false alarm. They won't come here for you" — her teeth slid against each other, then set — "and if they do come, I can manage them. They won't dare search my house for you, I should hope. Sit down and keep quiet, I say. I don't feel in the humor for a scene. I'll get you some whiskey."

After he had drunk the whiskey, he collapsed and, lying along the lounge, he panted like a dusty dog. She moved about, ghostly and restless, listening to the vague and distant noises of the night. They heard the unbroken river-murmur, the occasional crescendo and diminuendo of a passing train, at last the noisy humming of a rapidly driven car.

"What's that?" he cried, coming up to a sitting position and cowering against the cushions, clutching at them with his hands. "It's coming in here, I tell you!"

"Yes," she said. "Keep still. It's Heloise. She has been out to a party." Then as there came a faint murmur of Lelo's voice, Miss Selda's face grew calm and its lines smoothed themselves out. She came over to Sales, looked down at him and smiled at once scornfully and indifferently. "Why don't you go upstairs and get to bed? You are quite safe."

"Perhaps." He blew his lips in and out. "Well, perhaps I am. Could it have been a false alarm? The little rascal seemed scared himself. All his freckles stood out, he was so pale. Well — yes — yes," he murmured reassurance to himself as though his spirit were a scared child, "I might as well go up and get some sleep. But" — on his way to the door he turned and shook a finger at her — "I hold you responsible for my bodily safety, Selda."

She bent her head, smiling the Sir Sydney smile. "I accept the responsibility, William — it has been the absurd and undignified punishment for my — mistake. Go upstairs. Physically you are safe enough."

Sales blundered out into the hall and found himself face to face with Q. The young man bowed and smiled.

"I'll run you home, doc," he said pleasantly.

Miss Selda had shrunk back from that meeting, had closed the door upon it. She could not face Q, whom, in Sales's presence, she had insulted and dismissed, and who had responded to her call for help.

"I'm spending the night here," Sales gasped out.

"No, sir. You are n't. You're coming back with me. No use pulling back on the rope, doc. I was on my way to you. The boys will get you if you don't put your confidence in me. I was going to get round to you earlier this evening, but I've been delayed. It's about two o'clock, is n't it? We have three quarters of an hour, then, if we're quick." He stepped close to Sales. "Get out, you big bully," he said terribly, "and step into the Ford, or, by God, I'll thrash you into a bigger jelly than God and your own laziness has made."

Sales lifted up his voice to bleat for his patroness, but his throat shut under Q's grasp. He was backed slowly along the hall, across the veranda, and heaved up, still by the neck, into the waiting Ford. Q climbed to the wheel and they were off instantly at a terrifying speed.

"I can't keep the critter going unless I give him rein," Q explained equably. "Don't you shake yourself to pieces now, doc. Let the critter do the shaking for you. I've took your case into my hands and I'm going to look after it good and plenty. You do like I

tell you to, and you won't get your lickin' from the boys — much as you deserve it.

“Now, since we have n't got a whole lot of time, you get up on the witness stand while I keep my hand on the wheel, and you answer me a few questions. Along about forty year ago, you was spending a night at Folly Inn, was n't you? — Now, look ahere, you either speak out to me or you get your lickin' from the boys. Take your choice.”

“Yes,” muttered Sales.

“And that night, there come to the inn a young lady and a man. You knowed who the young lady was, and you begun to think it mighty queer for her to be there in the company of a married man, did n't you? Speak out so's I can hear above the critter's breathing. He's broken-winded.”

“Yes.”

“And along toward mornin' that lady, who was already scared and regretful of running away from home and mother, came and slipped a letter under your door, tellin' you she had run away and was scared and wanted to go back. Would you be kind enough to take her? Is that so?”

Sales nodded, or the Ford bobbed his head for him.

“Likely she put a whole lot more into that letter. She was scared silly and you was her last hope. Say, doc, she trusted you. And so you took her home, got her away quiet from the man, and helped her lie to her pa. And you kept the letter and you kept her secret for her.”

“Yes, sir, I did,” Sales spoke almost roundly.

"But, doc, what use did you make of that lucky letter, eh? Say, you did n't use your secret ag'in' the lady, did you? You did n't threaten that poor lady with tellin' her father or lettin' Sluypenkill prick up its ears or nothin' of that nature, did you?"

"No, I did not," said Sales, almost as roundly.

"You —— liar!" murmured Q. "I reckon the boys will have to have you, after all. You're too dirty a pack for me to handle."

"Do you blame a man for furthering his career, for letting a woman whom he had helped and saved and shielded from disgrace, further it for him?"

Q made no answer. They were nearing Sales's door and presently the doctor found himself, a steel hand on his arm, led back into his own house, through a sitting-room to his office at the rear. There Q switched on a light and looked at his watch.

"Not much time — but enough," he said. "The boys are on their way. Now, Sales" — he pointed the big, wan, shaken body to the patient's chair and seated himself in the doctor's usual place behind his desk — "this is where you get a diagnosis of *your* case.

"You're a liar and a coward and a dirty bully. You're a blackmailer; you're dern near to bein' a murderer. All your smoothness and your smilin' and your slidin' ain't agoin' to help you any now. Your career is reachin' chapter last. Fork out that precious document of yourn — I mean, Miss Grinscoombe's letter. It's in your waistcoat pocket in a leather case; I've seen you fingerin' it when she was gettin' restive. Hurry up, man."

In the silence came a distant shuffling of feet. The doctor pulled out the leather case numbly, and numbly handed a closely written thin sheet to Q. He glanced at it and put it into his pocket. Then he rose.

“Now,” he said, “I’m agoin’ to run you out of town. Here. Put out that light. By God, they’re on their way.”

He gripped his prisoner, locked the office door, and with all haste and silence the two men, Sales shuffling frantically ahead, got themselves along a passage, through a close, clean kitchen, and out into a garden.

“Quit your shakin’, man,” Q muttered as they plunged down a hill, through a brook and into a lane. “I left a note for them on your desk, tellin’ them I had took care of your case. I had to have them on their way, to squeeze the truth out of you. Pressure. Ah! Here’s my hoss!” They were almost upon the pony tied to a tree near the roadside, before Sales saw it. He started back violently.

Q, whistling softly through his teeth, untied a rope from the Western saddle. “I bought me a couple of these here ponies soon after I come,” he said; “I knowed they’d come in useful. You told me once, doc, you’d run a couple of youngsters out of Sluypen-kill.”

Sales, listening to sounds and seeing lights up there in his house, breathed fast and audibly.

“Well, sir, I am agoin’ to run you out. Onct — four months ago — I called you up to come see a woman took sick with heart trouble.” Here a rope settled about Sales’s body, his hands were pulled

back of him and deftly fastened together at the wrists. Q swung himself into the saddle. "You told me it was too bad a night; you told me it was better for them rabbits to die off. Well, sir, the woman died all right. It ain't such a bad night now. There's no rain. The dust is pretty thick when a pony kicks it up. But, because you did n't drive along this road that night, you're agoin' to run yourself along it now. Doc, you're agoin' to run every step of the way to the Gully. I've got a short rope on you and I kin keep you from droppin' in your tracks. You've made Miss Grinscoombe eat dust; now tell me how you like the taste of it yourself."

The pony started down the hill at a jog-trot.

Four miles of rough country road, four miles through apple orchards and by fields under a clearing sky of stars that began to fade into dawn, four miles of sweat and fear and anguish and dry, choking dust. When Q reined in his pony at last, the doctor dropped heavily to the earth.

Q dismounted, helped his victim to stand up, and dusted him off carefully, putting a soft hat on his head.

"You got to make a railway journey now," he said. "I'll see your things get sent after you. You're not comin' back to Sluypenkill. I've put your case into the hands of the mayor, the editor of the 'Daily News,' and the factory directors. They all know enough of your history to jail you, or worse. I've got the details about Mrs. Clinton and Mrs. Blain and that feller that died of gangrene. Your pet nurse

down there, Mrs. Nallow, has gone back on you and peached. We're sending her away in tears, a sadder, wiser woman. There ain't no future for you here, doc. You're on your own again. Well, I don't blame you for not feelin' conversational. Come on."

"I can't walk," choked William Sales.

"You gotta walk as far as the station yonder. Come on. I've got you."

They traveled slowly, the pony waiting with his reins down, Western fashion, and went along the road to a small station. Q dropped his burden like a dusty sack on one of the benches, strolled over to the office, and bought a ticket for a distant Middle-Western town.

"The poor old fool is drunk, but harmless," he said. "I'll put him on the train and he'll sleep like a lamb. The conductor will tell him where to change."

The station-master grinned. He had never seen Sluypenkill's leading physician, but, if he had, he would not have recognized the collapsed, heavily breathing man. The train came back, stopped at the signal for a passenger. Sales was plucked from his bench and heaved into a car. Q saw him propped in an empty seat, murmured, "Good-bye; hit a new trail, doc," and swung himself off as the train gathered its speed.

Sales with dull eyes stared out at the tall, still figure on the platform. It stood there, graceful, tense, and grim, to see him go. He was numbly glad that its face looked pale and set. Good-bye to Sluypenkill, to easy rewards, to security, to rest. Feebly he lifted his big, tremulous fist and shook it against the window.

CHAPTER XXV

A HOLD-UP

WHEN he had climbed up to his small room, already possessed through its one narrow window by sunrise, Q did not carry himself like a conqueror. He looked, rather, like a victim of the *mêlée*, white and dusty and grim, with a set mouth and painful eyes. He dropped down on the cot, too tired to think, and told himself that he had won his girl. Before he had time to analyze his emotions, a business for which he had small aptitude, a sleep of entire exhaustion smothered out even the first tremble of a thought. Only just as he lost himself, the linked hands of the conscious and the unconscious unwillingly disentwining, he endured a strange experience. From the summit of attained desire, he dropped into a terrible abyss of failure and of loss. He knew that Heloise loved him — she had told him that she would give him anything, everything he wished, and she knew his wishes well — but in the knowledge there was only a bitter desolation, as though the crescent moon had withered to blackness in his hands. So dark and terrible was the sensation that, had he been less exhausted, it must have driven him to the rescue of full consciousness; but, before he could struggle away, blankness overtook him and he slept profoundly.

At noon, bathed, brushed, and faultlessly attired, he presented himself at Mary Grinscombe's door.

It was open, and at the sound of his step she came quickly out as though she had been expecting him. In a dress of soft muslin petals, she looked like a small white rose, a dainty, dewy, rain-beaten rose. Her face had thinned, and this accentuated the beauty of her Irish eyes and left her sensitive mouth almost too expressive. She took him by both hands and looked up at him.

“You foolish Q — you’ve worried me dreadfully! What made you go away? I want that story of yours badly — you did n’t imagine I thought Dr. Sales had the right of it!” But, seeing the hawk glitter to his eyes and the sharp triumph that lay along his lips, she changed her expression swiftly.

“What’s happened, Q?”

“I’ve got my girl,” he whispered, and she clutched his hands tight before she dropped them.

“Come in. Tell me. You are wonderful!”

She seated herself with an unconscious air of stateliness in her schoolmarm’s place, her ruffled daintiness spreading out about her, her small hands folded together on the table. She gazed up at him very steadily under the arched eyebrows and up-curling lashes. He stood opposite her, turning his soft hat in his hand and looking slowly and wistfully about the room.

“It was n’t my education that won her for me, Miss Mary,” he drawled; she could not fail to discern his bitterness; “it was — my fists.” He looked down at his hands and she, instinctively looking at them too, saw torn knuckles and bruised fingers. “I reckon

the moon has got to be snatched at, Miss Mary, rather than prayed to."

He smiled and dropped into his place, putting out one of the strong and shapely damaged hands across the table toward her. His face threw off its new mask of victory, and sweetened — color rushing into its tanned pallor.

"Yes, ma'am, and Sophie's got her Laurie-boy. I've done pretty near everything I set out to do, and I'm plumb near to bein' satisfied with myself."

"You look," Mary shrewdly observed, "very much farther from self-assurance than I've ever seen you look. Q, please tell me the story of your methods with the 'Sophie gel.'"

He did, gently and patiently, not letting her startled "Ohs" disturb his drawling, half-ironic description of the topsy-turvy melodrama.

"And now I'm going to New York."

"What are you going to do in New York?" She sat back as though pain made her unable any longer to keep that dainty erectness of attitude. He flushed hot and high.

"First, I'm agoin' to buy the finest, classiest ring you need ever wish to see, and next I'm agoin' to take your pa's book to visit with a publisher."

She forgot one pain for another, shaking her head patiently. "It's just, dear Q, come back with one of the horrid slips. We laugh, Papa and I, but it does hurt. We need the money pretty badly — worse than I thought we did! That is — now it is even more a matter of pride to pay it back than we ever thought

it would be. Oh,” she broke out suddenly, “if I could only make a lot and a lot of money, if I could get away! Sometimes I feel that for one breath of free fresh air I’d give my soul! Don’t look at me that way,” she laughed shakily, and dropped her eyes to her hand; “you have — such eyes!”

They brooded over her and through her. “I was thinking,” he said slowly, “of free fresh air,” and his chest lifted on a struggling breath.

The tiny room contained their silence loyally, its clock ticking the eternal consolation of going — going — gone! the two great globes, terrestrial and celestial, gleamed like mysterious bubbles that could vanish at a pin-prick into space. Mary at last struggled away from that silence. She went over to her desk, gathered together a vast mass of manuscript, put it into a clean brown envelope and brought it to Q. “There,” she said, smiling, “take it and find out for yourself whether any publisher will ever read it through!”

“One is agoin’ to read it.” He rose and took the bundle. “I’ve got to get my train,” he said soberly, touched her fingers, and went out.

Another man would have written to his lady, or seen her, or sent her a message. Q, used to enforced absences and unbridgable distances, did not even think of calling up Heloise on the telephone. He had his own theory of how an accepted suitor should act; a part of this theory was that an engaged man should appear with a ring in his hand.

The clerk at Tiffany’s began by being patient and

ended by being enthusiastic. Q's head almost touching his over the counter, they examined jewel after jewel, discussed setting upon setting. The final choice was a pearl like a full moon with an arrowy sparkle of sapphires and diamonds pointing about it.

"It looks," said Q meditatively, "like moonlight and starlight layin' in the holler of your hand, don't it?" And the clerk, being, like many other clerks, an imprisoned poet, forced himself to smile at the magnificent Westerner's poetry, though to do so he had to grimace slightly. Sentiment bends often over the Tiffany counters, the clerks are fairly accustomed to it, but it usually disguises itself decently in slang or banter or impersonal dignity; Q's poetry had stalked forth unashamed.

He had put his purchase carefully into an inner pocket, the same one that held the faded record of Miss Selda's passionate blunder, and then, knitting himself for battle, he sought out an address.

The atmosphere of a publishing house, still, spacious, leathery, chilled all his nerves. He stood at a sort of barrier behind which gray, scholarly, old-young, young-old people moved without haste on various dignified errands, and at last he attracted the attention of a bald-headed young scholar with horn-rimmed spectacles.

"Say," murmured Q huskily, "I want to see your boss."

The great goggles twinkled upon him. "You mean Mr. Chiswick or Mr. Mortimer?"

"The top boss. I reckon that would be Mr. Chiswick, would n't it?"

"He's the senior partner," smiled Goggles patiently. "Have you an appointment? Do you know him personally?"

"No, sir. But I hev got to see him in one of them glass cages — where I hev located his name."

"I believe he's busy. Let me have your card."

"That's something my edication has n't got round to yet. Let me write it down for you, stranger; it's a right tricky name."

He wrote it in pencil, and with it the now frankly grinning Goggles departed in the direction of the glass cage. Q stood for fifteen minutes and sat for fifteen more. He looked at tables loaded with books and his heart sank. He felt for something heavy in his pocket. At last Goggles reappeared.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Kinwydden, but Mr. Chiswick is very much occupied this afternoon. Perhaps I could attend to your business."

"No, sir. I hev got to see the boss."

"I'm very sorry."

"Don't waste your sorrow. I'm agoin' to wait."

Goggles's smile vanished and seemed to be translated upward into a frown.

"It will be no use, Mr. Kinwydden. Mr. Chiswick is definitely engaged."

"When does your shop close?"

"Mr. Chiswick will be leaving at about five-thirty to-day."

Q looked at his watch.

"I'll wait," he said, and sat down to roll and light a cigarette. Goggles, sarcastic and temporarily baf-

fled, withdrew behind tables to another glass cage, presumably his own. Q waited. A typist not far away smiled upon him and he dazzled her by his appreciative return. Another clerk presently inquired his business, made a tentative effort to win into Mr. Chiswick's sanctuary, and came back to advise Mr. — er — er — to write down his business. Q patiently repeated himself.

"I don't suffer any from waitin'," he explained sweetly, and again the typist and he exchanged beautiful and more intimate smiles.

By the time the lights came on, Q had smoked his tenth cigarette and began to roll his eleventh. The typist suddenly and impulsively rose. She went over to Chiswick's door and knocked smartly. There was something chivalrous and dauntless in the carriage of her head. She remained for a long time in the cage; Q could see her shadow standing above some one and swaying eloquently. When she came out, she came swiftly on glad feet. They brought her through a gate to Q, who rose and stepped on his eleventh cigarette.

"Mr. Chiswick will see you," she said.

"Say," said Q, drawing a breath, "I never seen a woman I liked better at first sight!" And he followed her to the glass door.

Mr. Chiswick, when disclosed behind his desk, was a square brown man, neither old nor young, with slightly bare temples, nervous, dark eyes and a pleasant, though chary, smile. He leaned back in a swivel chair and lifted weary lids.

"Since you must see me, Mr. Kinwydden," he said, "please be as brief as possible. I've had a busy afternoon."

"Mine has n't been as busy as I'd hev liked it to be," said Q. He stepped back to the door and locked it, — Chiswick starting violently in his chair, — then laid a bulky manuscript on the desk. After this he straightened, drew an automatic from his right-hand coat pocket, and leveled it at the astounded publisher.

"Quiet! Quiet!" he said. "You read that there writin' from end to end and don't you quit readin' it until you come to page the last and don't you skip a word."

Mr. Chiswick, staring at the maniac and breathing fast, drew the manuscript over. "Yes, yes, of course, with pleasure," he said soothingly. He moistened his lips and began to read with jerky, upward glances behind which was evidently a brain searching for escape or rescue.

"I believe," he murmured cautiously, almost singing the words, "that we have had this manuscript before, Mr. Kinwydden."

"You hev sure had it before, but you hev never read it before. This time you're agoin' to read it."

"I'm afraid," murmured the publisher — then, glancing up and singing even more sweetly, "you are surely not the author?"

"Do I look it?" drawled the highwayman, and smiled.

For some reason that smile took the edge off Mr.

Chiswick's alarm. The man was either a maniac or a practical joker of some obscure and extreme variety. His best chance was to oblige the fellow and read this impossible garbled stuff. With a mind rather more at ease and less wandering eyes, Chiswick, making a strong effort, focused his attention on the clearly typed sheets. Page after page was thrown impatiently aside, then suddenly he leaned forward and his face gleamed. So a desert traveler greets the fragrance of fresh water under palms. Q slipped his automatic into his pocket and stood at ease. The publisher, glancing up, relaxed and read. The glass cage with its brilliant green-shaded light, which threw a white circle across the manuscript and the bent head, seemed to be possessed by the delicate, authoritative speech of Henry Grinscoombe. At last, Chiswick looked up. "This is great stuff," he said. "Mr. Kinwydden — " then, seeing his safety, he jerked to his feet, "I am going to hand you over to the police," he ejaculated fiercely.

"The gun was n't loaded, sir," Q murmured. "Say, be reasonable — I wanted you to read that book!"

Chiswick glared, and through the glare slowly emerged a delighted sense of humor and a satisfied desire for unusual experiences. He slowly reseated himself.

"Your methods," he said, "are a little extreme, are n't they? But I believe we are going to be grateful to you. We're going to thank you. Yes — I doubt if I should ever have read the thing, without your — prodding. There is an extraordinary change

which does not occur until about halfway through the third chapter. Listen!”

Q listened wistfully.

“Great stuff, eh?”

“Ain’t that the truth!” he murmured and looked down. He had never been able to get the drift of the Earthworm’s philosophy. “You are agoin’ to make a book of it, then?”

“If Mr. Mortimer agrees — we are. Yes, I may safely say that we positively will. But not because of your automatic, Mr. Kinwydden.”

“Oh, that was as harmless as a child, Mr. Chiswick. You’ll put that down in writin’ for me — I mean, as to makin’ a book.”

“Yes. Here, I’ll call my stenographer. What’s the fellow’s name — Grinscoombe — good old New York name that — eh?”

The stenographer took down the letter rapidly — a careful appreciation, an acceptance with one condition — that the author agree to throwing the material contained in the first three chapters into the form of an introduction, that the book itself begin with Chapter Four.

“That letter will go off as soon as I get Mr. Mortimer’s decision, and I’ve no doubt of its being favorable. And now, Mr. Kinwydden, we’re past office hours. If I decide not to hand you over to the police — will you have dinner with me?”

“You’re a real man!” ejaculated Q; and added, “And I’m right sorry about that dinner. I’d mighty well like to come, but I’ve got to get back. I” — he

felt the generous and plucky victim of his hold-up must have a convincing excuse — "I hev got to get a new ring to a lady," he said.

Chiswick found himself involved in elaborate congratulations.

An August moon and a breathless harvest night — the long Manor drive, straight and silver, barred by its still poplar shadows — at its end, the Manor door open and golden as a human smile: through this fairy blue enchantment of outdoors, its barrier shadows, its eerie, bewildering lights, Q moved like a man conscious of a spell. The ring lay like a magic token against his heart. He had won through such shadow barriers, he had been dazed by such uncertain lights, he could hardly trust himself to believe in the golden welcome up there at the journey's end. He leapt up the steps and stopped, to get his breath, shaken by emotion, by suspense; he remembered the chill May night when he had left Heloise with a sharp dread in his heart. He shut his eyes, thinking of victory.

Then he went in softly. The hall was still; a big moth fluttered about a shaded light; the gold curtains hung unmoved, like solid metal. In its silence it seemed a hostile place. Q took out his ring, pushed back the golden draperies with a conscious effort of his will and stood within them, clutching them together behind him with both hands, so that the jewel cut into his palm.

Below Sir Sydney's portrait, Heloise had twisted herself about in the arms of a tall man. They fell from

her, and she wavered like a white flame in a wind. She was dressed in silver with the crescent of brilliants in her hair. Q moved forward half a stride, and then she spoke, quickly, never so surely, a little loudly, as from a height.

"Where have you been, Q? I tried to get you yesterday. Mr. Marston has just got back from Russia. I want you to meet him." Her eye caught Q's and held it steadily. "I have promised him to be his wife."

Probably for the first time since his overgrown boyhood, Q did a physically awkward thing. He dropped his ring and it rolled over to Lelo's feet. Marston bent quickly and picked it up. The magnificent jewel glimmered on his palm. Heloise stared down at it with parted, geranium-red lips. But Marston looked from it to her. His fine-cut face quietly betrayed a question. She could not gather her answer; all her young self-possession left her; instinctively she looked to Q for help. Marston, too, turned his eyes from her to the man: they were rather deep-set eyes, unpromising. Q answered their challenge, but it was the stark prayer in Lelo's face that shaped his speech.

"My mistake," he murmured, "not hers." He took back the ring and, turning it in his fingers, smiled imperturbably. "I reckon I'm not used to civilized ways," he said. "Nobody's to blame but the folks that did n't give me my trainin'. Mr. Marston, I did Miss Grinscombe a service and she thanked me for it. She did n't do anything but thank me, but, being a plumb fool and an ignorant man, I did n't

savvy. Instead of waiting for her explanations, I took the bit in my mouth and bolted like a bronc. My mistake. Miss Grinscoombe, will you take the ring — as an engagement present?" He took her hand boldly and coolly in one of his, placed the ring in its narrow and icy palm, and folded her long fingers round it. "That's payment for my education," he said — "it has come cheap. I'll say good-bye and wish you both happiness. I'm agoin' back West, where I belong. I'm plumb tired of makin' a fool of myself."

With that he smiled again, lifted his eyes once somberly to Sir Sydney Grinscoombe, bowed and went out.

CHAPTER XXVI

MISS SELDA'S PRIDE

THE hall, outside of the gold curtains, seemed to be full of white, dense mist. Q stood clutching the edge of the table and moving a hand across his eyes patiently to clear them. His heart and brain were loud with jeering voices, pointing fingers, mocking laughter. Sir Sydney's ghost raised a thin, lace-ruffled hand from his gold-knobbed stick and struck him across the face. Q started physically and made out that it was not Sir Sydney's ghost, but Miss Selda, smiling faintly and holding out her hand. She had not struck him, but, at sight of her, his heart turned to iron and he shut his teeth tight on an oath.

"Will you come in here with me, Q?" she asked. "I want to talk to you."

He followed her, still with locked teeth and lips, into the drawing-room, where she seated herself and looked up.

The slave had buried the treasure, had eased her heart of dangerous confidences, could now be delivered over to his death. There was a sort of death in her cold face. The mist cleared from his brain, his eyes cleared, he looked down at her, and Grinscoombery could not shield her from that look.

"I meant to tell this news to you myself," she said; "I meant to spare you from any little shock it might still be to you to see my niece and Fred Marston to-

gether, but you came in so quietly — the door must have been open — I suppose they told you — that you met Fred — ”

A capital F danced before Q's eyes and illuminated his memory.

“Yes, ma'am,” he said, “I met Fred . . . 't was him you were saving her for all the while. Doc said you had ‘some small use’ for me in your plans for your niece. I was to keep her safe from Fer-dee-nand, to hold her mind steady, to amuse her safely until Marston made up his mind to come back and get her.”

“You are very discerning, Q. Marston took the risk last fall of appearing not to care for her, I imagine, because he wished first to assure himself of a future. Heloise could never marry a poor man — you must have known that, Q.”

“Yes, ma'am. I'd 'a' never asked her to think of me if I had n't been so awful rich.”

She jerked like a wired doll. “You rich!”

“Yes, ma'am, rich enough to buy the full moon out of the sky, like Miss Mary said I could. It was oil I struck on my little old ranch — ”

Miss Selda was staring up at him with a certain blankness in her look.

“I took a greater chance than I knew,” she said. “Why did n't you use your armory, Q? Why did n't you tell me that? Why did n't you tell Heloise?”

He half-turned from her and leaned against the mantel, a composed and graceful figure.

“There's a lot of things you'll never savvy, ma'am.

And no especial reason why you should. There's a whole lot of difference in our raisin' — I was broke one way, you and Heloise another way. We can't answer each other's questions rightly, ma'am, and that proves that it's not the learnin' you can get from books that counts. Onct in a while a woman is born with an understanding heart — ” He paused, wisdom breaking upon his brain.

“I can't ask you to forgive me, Q,” she said.

And abruptly he was aware of her strong, restrained emotion. It did not particularly soften him, but it made him turn and look down at her patiently.

“Life hits harder than a woman,” he said slowly; “she had n't ought to strike first. I am right sorry for you, lady.”

She shrank from this; the waver uncontrollably assailed her look.

“If I could turn you out of my memory,” she said slowly, as though against her will, “if I could turn you out of — my heart — Q — I would.”

“You knowed he was comin' back for her,” said Q; “you knowed you was savin' her for him. You knowed I was helpin' you to save her for him. You hev used my love to — to kill itself. That don't take forgivin', lady, it takes somethin' more. I will wish you good-bye — but first I hev to give you something.”

“To give me?” She looked up, startled.

He was taking a paper from his pocket and his face was a mask of gentleness. “You can be as proud as you like now, lady,” he said.

She took the paper incredulously, stared down at it

as though it had been drenched in poison, and crumpled it slowly in her two hands. She could not lift her eyes; they were strangely weighted. She knew that she was trembling from head to foot.

It was uncomfortable to feel that she could not meet Q's eyes.

"Doc Sales has left the place," the gentle, familiar voice was saying evenly, "and he won't come back. I don't like to see folks scared. Will you be easy now in your heart?"

She could not ask him to explain his miracle, she could not dare to thank him for it; she could only shake, and presently, with a terrible contraction of her heart, tears came and fell . . .

Small she looked, and old, and pitiful.

He moved closer and rested his hand upon her.

"Don't you cry," he said, the iron gone from his voice, "don't you cry. It's all right, lady. You don't need to worry any — "

She caught his hand, and pressed it to her lips. She hid her face.

When she looked up, he was gone. The curtains inside the door were swinging, his step rang firmly on the road. Miss Selda could not have said what she felt. Like any other woman, she had been understood, she had been served, she had been forgiven. Her pride was rescued from its slavery, but she knew that, remembering Q's eyes, she would never be very proud again. Her own cruelty had cut her soul too deep. She was ashamed and desolate. At last she tore her letter into a hundred little pieces and burned them on the hearth.

CHAPTER XXVII

OLD BOTTLES

To Q, the following morning, was forwarded, from the River Hotel to his present quarters, a telegram. He read it over an untasted breakfast in Stringer's kitchen. It was from West Lemmon.

Come to me at once. Very urgent.

LAURENCE SALES

Later in the morning, he was admitted to Sales's house, but, instead of being taken to the office he had entered on his former visit, he was led into an upstairs sitting-room, flanked by books, charmingly furnished, with such pictures as made Q, even in his mood of bitter disillusionment, focus an appreciative attention: small pictures that opened out of doors — showing the very motion of sunlight on a moving tree and fluttering white dress, the very slash of fluent water about a purple, sun-flecked rock. There was a mountain, too, white-capped, in a distance, beneath some amazing tower of clouds. He turned from somber communion with the mountain at Laurie's entrance, and was startled by the pallor of his face, set tight as stone, under the close-cropped red hair.

Q started forward, holding out his hand, but Laurie made no move to take it, stood still, and looked him between the eyes.

Instantly the Westerner was taut, ready, steeled.

"Yesterday, my father came to me here. He was

in a terrible condition, pulse all but gone; he told me a story of incredible persecution. He had been driven out of Sluypenkill, discredited, stripped of his livelihood and of his reputation. It seems to have been your doings, Kinwydden. I am his son and I demand an explanation."

Q answered instantly without the slightest apparent perturbation.

"I thought you must have knowed your father. I figured that you'd be about expectin' somethin' of this nature. That's one reason why I wanted you to make tracks for the West — to get away from all this. I did n't savvy it would hurt your feelin's any — "

"My own father?"

"Well, sir, fathers is something that I know very little about. I never had one of my own and most of the boys I've traveled with shook their fathers off soon and early. Anyway, you surely ain't responsible for your father's doin's, and as for what I done — it was my duty. The fight was on between him and me from the start. I warned him. He done what he could to cross me — he was as bent to run me out and ruin my reputation and my career as I was to do the same by him. He got pretty far on his way to doin' it, too. If you had felt yourself responsible for him, Sales, you had ought to've kep' watch over him and his doin's. Any time these past twelve years, he might have been jailed — or manhandled — had n't it been for a scared woman — all his life he's been shielded by a woman, he's been hidin' behind her skirts — "

“Hush!” Laurie put up his hand and moved white lips. “Don’t speak so loud. He’s dead!”

Q stood, unmoved.

“I consider you directly responsible for his death.”

“If I am, I take the responsibility. He had ought to have died.”

Laurie sprang forward and caught the speaker by the arm.

“By God! What do you mean?”

“I am sorry — if you loved him, but the man to my knowledge caused more than one death. If I had left him to the Mill hands that night, he’d have died worse and quicker. I made him run where he once refused to drive to save a woman’s life. She was a poor young woman with children. She was took with a heart attack. A stimulant, as you know, if it had got to her in time, might have saved her. I called up doc on the telephone. I explained the case. It was a bad night, rainin’ hard, and he said — ‘Call me up on a night like this for a case at the Gully? — the quicker that rabbit-warren dies off, the better —’”

It was impossible not to recognize the speech — it seemed to be shaped in Sales’s very throat. Laurie turned away and put a hand to his eyes.

“And that’s only one case, man. I could tell you a half-dozen others. That was my introduction to your father, and, when I left the ’phone and came back to that woman and saw her die, I set my mind to tracking him down and punishing him for his sins. If the laws can’t protect poor folks, if the laws is got around by money or power, then the laws hev to be

enforced by free men. Ain't that the truth, Laurie? Sluypenkill had been patient with your father too long; it had been scared of the influence that worked for him. It had been a mighty timid place. Ellison tried to expose your father, and he was ruined. A working-man tried to get justice against him, and *he* was driven away. If I have been a harder judge it's because I'm a harder man. Doc Sales ain't the first man I've — killed — though I did n't set out to kill him — mind you! — and felt that I had done God's work in killin'. He died from the effects of his own way of living. He died because he did n't have the nerve or the grit to take his punishment. It was n't in him to make a fresh start; he had been pampered too long. A man can't afford to make a pet of his own soul."

Young Sales had walked over to a window and was standing, his hands clenched at his sides. Q listened to his hard breathing, and his heart began to be disturbed. This was the man whose friendship he had greatly coveted, whose good opinion he had overwhelmingly desired. The man was judging him, hating him, about — if he did no worse — to throw him out of his life. Q moved slowly back and forth across the room, a storm gathered in his breast.

"It will be impossible for me to accept any service from you now," said Laurie presently, without looking about. "Naturally I will leave my practice here. I can't stay. The scandal about my father is bound to grow and spread. Also, it will be impossible for me to form any sort of association, any tie at all, with a man

who is directly responsible for his disgrace and death. Mind, you have forced me to admit a wild sort of justice in your proceedings, but — the fact remains — that, whatever my father did or left undone, he *is* my father. And he came to me in his trouble. And died as a consequence of the treatment he received. Justice is one thing, Q Kinwydden, and violence is quite another. Your violence against a man almost twice your age seems to me cowardly and unjustifiable. My father” — he choked a little — “was helpless in your hands. As helpless as Sophie when you tied her to your chair and forced her to wait for you. That piece of ‘knight-errantry’ is as incomprehensible to me as this one. I find our standards of conduct unreconcilable. To me you seem a savage. If you are what the West produces — I confess I have no sympathy with the West.”

“Don’t you judge the West by me,” said Q quickly. “I ain’t no fair specimen. The West ain’t responsible fer me. I raised myself.” Then, in an accent of real despair, he added, “I wisht I could get you to understand.”

Laurie faced about, lifted his head, and looked at the speaker. The eyes of the man revealed him, his honesty, his dignity, his strength. “How can a man live except by his own knowledge, Laurie? I got my knowledge from my life. I got my feelin’ of what is right and wrong from watchin’ God’s ways with men. I can forgive a lot of things that likely would turn you sick, but there’s things I can’t forgive, and when I see them I’ve got to fight them. And I’ve got to

fight them in my own way, not yours nor any other man's. If life has taught me to use my hands, is that my fault? Doc sinned with his head — if he'd done his deeds with his hands, he'd have died long since. Had n't it been for my tyin' up your Sophie gel — where would she be now? Had n't it been for my runnin' your father out, who might n't have suffered and died on account of him? One woman I know has been in hell for years. To my way of thinking, *he* was the coward and the bully, and rough handling was what he needed and deserved. I am likely a savage. But I did n't hurt your Sophie gel. She understands. Perhaps she's a savage like me. Your father knew what to expect from me. I saved him that night from a horse-whipping. He was thankful to me. All the savages ain't in the West. I don't usually waste words in explaining myself, but you hev hurt me pretty bad because I know that you are a real man. I kind of wanted to name you friend. That can't be now, but it can be that you will do me justice. Later, when you have stopped grieving for your father's death, you will see me clear. Until then, I better say good-bye."

He walked slowly toward the door, his head up.

"Wait a moment," Laurie said, and stood, hands clasped behind him, looking Q steadily and quietly in the eyes. Then he put out his hand. Q caught at it, color flooded his face, he dropped his lids. There was a quivering in his long, strong hand.

"Will you go out to my town — with Sophie?" asked the Westerner beseechingly.

Laurie said "yes," wrung the hand, and turned away.

He sat for an hour after the Westerner had left, and cleared his spirit, slowly, painfully, of many willful misconceptions. And his pride hurt him sorely — it had needed, it would seem, this ignorant, untamed man to shape his life and love for him. It had needed this same ruthless, natural man to tear the veil away from his knowledge of his father. He had blinded himself to the truth, he had kept himself from Sluypenkill — was n't he, after all, responsible for that wretched father's death? Would he not, after all — but for the savage — be responsible for something that would have been worse for Sophie than her death? The new strong wine of action, of unhesitating, open-eyed, uncomplicated force. Was there a place for it in the civilized world? Probably not, but when it broke loose — did n't it sometimes break old galling chains and free profound despairs? His life would be the cleaner for Q's passionate interference. Sluypenkill would be the cleaner. To see what was right and to do it, instantly, without thought of self. Yes — Laurie smiled the smile of cynical civilization — and then he stoned to death by an uncomprehending mob. Well he and Sophie would try the West.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A COPY-BOOK

HALF unwillingly Q dragged himself back to Mary Grinscoombe's door. It was hard to be beaten; it was harder to admit defeat. And the little schoolmarm had done so much to arm him for his battle. Only two days ago he had come to her for applause; it was sore to his pride to ask now for her consolation. And yet, he wanted her badly, and he must surely tell her, and say good-bye.

She did n't come to answer his ringing, so he let himself in and looked for her in the parlor. At last, there being no sound in the house, he sat down in his old place. He stared at the pages of his copy-book — the last copy of all. It was a proverb she had chosen for him — "Still waters run deep." And he looked along it idly, absorbed by the aching weariness which had become his heart. He had not written very well; the letters were all blurred. Some one must have spilled water over them. The page was blistered here and there; she had probably been fixing her flowers. Funny! She was usually so daintily sure about everything she did. Not until months later, alone on a great plain under the stars, did the explanation of the blurred letters and the blistered page flash upon Q. It was then the kindling spark of a greater illumination. Now, he pushed the book away with an impatient sigh.

Mary came into the kitchen. He had not the wish to hasten her entrance, but when, in the course of her small undertakings, she did appear, he came to his feet and smiled.

She was all flushed and sparkling, radiant and released. Her eyes kept a personal secret of unhappiness, but, for the rest, she had yielded utterly to the first real joy of her life. She ran quickly over to him.

“Oh, Q, whatever can I say to thank you! Yes. The letter came. It went through and through us like lightning! You know” — she laughed — “poor Papa is so happy that he’s had to be put to bed. He went round and round the room like a bewildered moth. He could n’t — he simply could n’t believe it. No — you can’t know what it will mean.”

“I’m sure glad.” He drew a deep and very bitter breath. “Then I hev done something even if it is n’t what I set out to do.”

She stood, flushed, and began to puzzle over him. He was changed.

“But, Q, you’ve done everything!”

He held her eyes with his own smiling ones. She could n’t see into his heart. She had a sudden achey feeling that no one perhaps would ever see into it again.

“I have n’t got my moon,” he said. “She’s slipped through my fool fingers — somehow. There was another fellow.”

Mary was terribly, astonishingly white.

“Heloise!”

"Yes. She is going to marry a real man, and I reckon he's a real gentleman. He looks like he'd knowed readin' and writin' and arithmetic, history and geography, languages alive and dead, from his cradle up, Miss Mary. He sure does. And now I'm agoin' to go back West where I belong. May I see your father? I've come to tell you a good-bye."

Upstairs, he of the white panache raised himself quickly on his pillow at Q's entrance. The Grinscombe face, purged of pride and bitterness, spiritually beautified, Sir Sydney transfigured, smiled, lips and eyes and heart, at Q. And he felt that here at least savagery had justified itself. The pistol and the publisher had been the right conjunction of planets for Henry's happiness. The Earthworm triumphed visibly.

"Some day you'll read it, Q?"

"Yes, sir. I sure will." (And he did, too, understandingly, his education having gained an impetus that no changes in his life could stop.)

"We've had some great talks, great times, Q. Don't think I did n't understand what you did for me! I find it difficult to wish you a good-bye."

"I'll be looking at the stars above the range," said Q huskily, "and saying their names — that will spell yours over to me often, sir."

There was something perilously fragile about the little man in bed. He was like a delicate clear vessel filled with some fluid exquisitely, dangerously vital. Q was afraid. He left the room with a blindness of tears across his eyes.

Down in the sitting-room, five minutes later, Mary leaned against the window-sill heavily for such a small and slender person, to watch Q down the path. She could n't follow him to the door. She found that her courage was all gone — all dead.

Halfway to the gate, he started, as though he had forgotten something. He looked back with a dazed, groping air. Her heart stood still. Then he went on slowly, and slowly swinging, lithe and young and splendid, he passed away down the shabby, empty little street.

CHAPTER XXIX

BESIDE STILL WATERS

Q WENT back to his West — not the West of oil-fields and mushroom cities, but to his own old West of mountain and of range. There he drank deep of night winds and rode far under noon skies and white stars, breathing the aromatic dust of sage. He renewed acquaintance with slow-spoken, deep-eyed folk and with his nosing pony, and he pondered patiently over his experience. His education took, during these wide autumn days, deep root.

While he rode and pondered, he founded his ranch — two thousand acres to be dedicated to the raising of fine stock. Q spent his money with a cool, far-sighted lavishness, so that, before snow came, he possessed his land and had “builded him” his log house, polished and fragrant without and within, like the ark of the covenant. It was spring again before he had furnished it, however, and in the furnishing he showed the influence of Sluypenkill. It was not the usual ranch interior; it was quiet and dim and rather beautiful. Much of the richness was furnished by long shelves of books. Mary helped him to choose his library. They exchanged frequent letters in which he was able better and better to articulate his soul. He strode forth on the pages in big black writing, humorous, masculine, and dignified — and he read Mary in her funny, emphatic, crabbed pen-scratchings, so

quick, so mirthful, tart, and sensitive. It was May when the last box of books arrived. He stood to arrange them in his big, clean living-room, as yet uncurtained. Doors and windows stood open, and through them poured fragrance of emerald-tipped pines and sappy aspens, fragrance of winds from high snows and lupine patches, and always the fresh rattling of the creek beneath his window, the airy crystalline chords of bird-singing, a wistful, aching medley of sight and smell and sound which seemed to be trying to repeat over and over an inexpressible delight. Q paused in his arranging of the volumes and stood with his eyes half-closed. He had never so poignantly felt the spring before. He reached over to the top of his shelves and opened Mary's letter, which he had been saving to read at his leisure. Suddenly, with spring in his throat, he could n't wait. It was brief and unsteadily written. The little father was dead.

I think happiness was too much for him, Q. He had never in his life been happy — only brave and patient. I am glad he lived to see his book. Aunt Selda came to see him at the last. After he had sent her some money she had lent him. It seemed to hurt her terribly — his death. She cried. I am going away from this house. I can't bear it any more. I'll be teaching somewhere.

Q put down the letter. He looked pale and fierce. He strode out, whistled to his grazing horse, swung into the saddle, and turned toward space. All afternoon he rode, his hand resting for comfort on the pony's neck, and, dark coming upon him far from

home, he picketed the animal and lay down before a fire under the stars. Up there beyond them now the little philosopher was free. Doubtless, thought Q, he sat and discoursed quaint wisdom to the spirits of just men. What did n't he know now? What did n't he understand? — the shakiness made steady, the watery eyes clear, the lips healed of their patience, the brave panache lifted into light. By the glow of the campfire Q re-read Mary's letter. It was blistered with tears. And that released and explained a memory of the spattered copy-page. She must have been crying over it — crying over his lessons. Why — in the name of wonder? Why?

This small problem he pondered half the wakeful night under those constellations Henry Grinscoombe had named for him once in a July harvest-field. And, before dawn, guided by the one small light, he slept with an illuminated heart.

Miss Myrtle Clayton, very slim, very languid, very much waved as to hair and very much manicured as to fingers, minding the desk at the River Hotel, was instantly aware of a gently spoken question and lifted her head.

"Can I have Room 90 on the fourth floor, lady?"

She looked into the speaker's eyes and there her observation stopped and stood quiet. Miss Myrtle Clayton pushed forward the hotel register.

"Yes, sir," she said. "Room 90."

The stranger wrote his name, Q. T. Kinwydden, and added an address. Then he turned to a blond ele-

vator boy, who dropped his jaw and dilated his prominent eyes.

"Hullo, Bill," said Q. They gripped each other by the hand.

"Are n't you tired of your buzz-box yet? Have they given you a raise?"

"Nope," grinned Bill, regretfully; "I'm lucky to hold down my job."

They mounted slowly, Bill swallowing some incomprehensible obstacle under his collar.

"Want to go West?" asked Q. "I have n't any buzz-box in my hotel, but, say, you can learn how to chop wood. How'd you like to roustabout for a change of air — and wages?"

The lift faltered, fell, caught itself together and bounded upwards, bouncing to a stop at the fourth floor. Q murmured something and stepped out precipitately. "God!" he said, "things is just as dangerous in these parts as they used to be."

Bill tumbled after him along a renovated hall. In Room 90, also renovated, he began to stutter.

"S-say, mister, do you mean it?"

"I sure do. What you waitin' for — a tip?"

"Don't you dast give me one!" Bill shouted, and, crimson in the face, he bolted, slamming the door and reeling along the crimson hall, drunk with the thought of change, of liberty, of unrestricted hero-worship.

Q strolled over to the window and looked down upon Main Street. It was unchanged — still a cross between Sugar City and Oil Corners, and no compli-

ment to either. Q bathed and dressed and ate his dinner soberly — a better dinner, served by a far less striking waitress. Miss Sherman and Miss Winters were away. School had closed. It was already June.

After dinner, the Westerner, with a white face and brilliant eyes, strode down Main Street and turned into a familiar lane. The beating of his heart disturbed him. He found it difficult to breathe. The house was not closed, the door even stood open in its old, informal fashion. Q got himself across its threshold and stood, dumb and breathless, in the doorway of the tiny parlor. It was stripped of the familiar things. Mary looked up from a trunk before which she was kneeling on the floor, clapped her hands together, and, falling back against her heels, spread both those small, hard-working hands over a throbbing, flaming face.

She was in black; very small and slim she looked — her hair sparkled ruddily. He came over and lifted her up and, shaking uncontrollably, drew down her hands.

“Miss Mary — I have n’t forgotten your copy — ‘Still waters run deep’ — my pride and my will was set wrong, but it was you my heart wanted from the first. Only — I’m sure the gol-derndest ignorantest growed man in the U-ni — ”

She looked up, flung both her arms about him, and, shutting her eyes tight, she put her mouth quickly against his.

And speaking stopped.

A little crescent moon above the still, high tops of firs; below, a camp-fire glowing dimly, ponies cropping on a dewy hillside; up there a snow-peak dizzily high . . . Q lay in his blankets and watched the crescent moon. A shining figure seemed to shape itself below it, dressed in silver — it wore a small and scornful smile. Q turned from it restlessly, rose on an elbow and stretched out his right hand. It grasped another hand, warm and small, and Mary, waking, sighed contentedly and looked up like a child from her sleep.

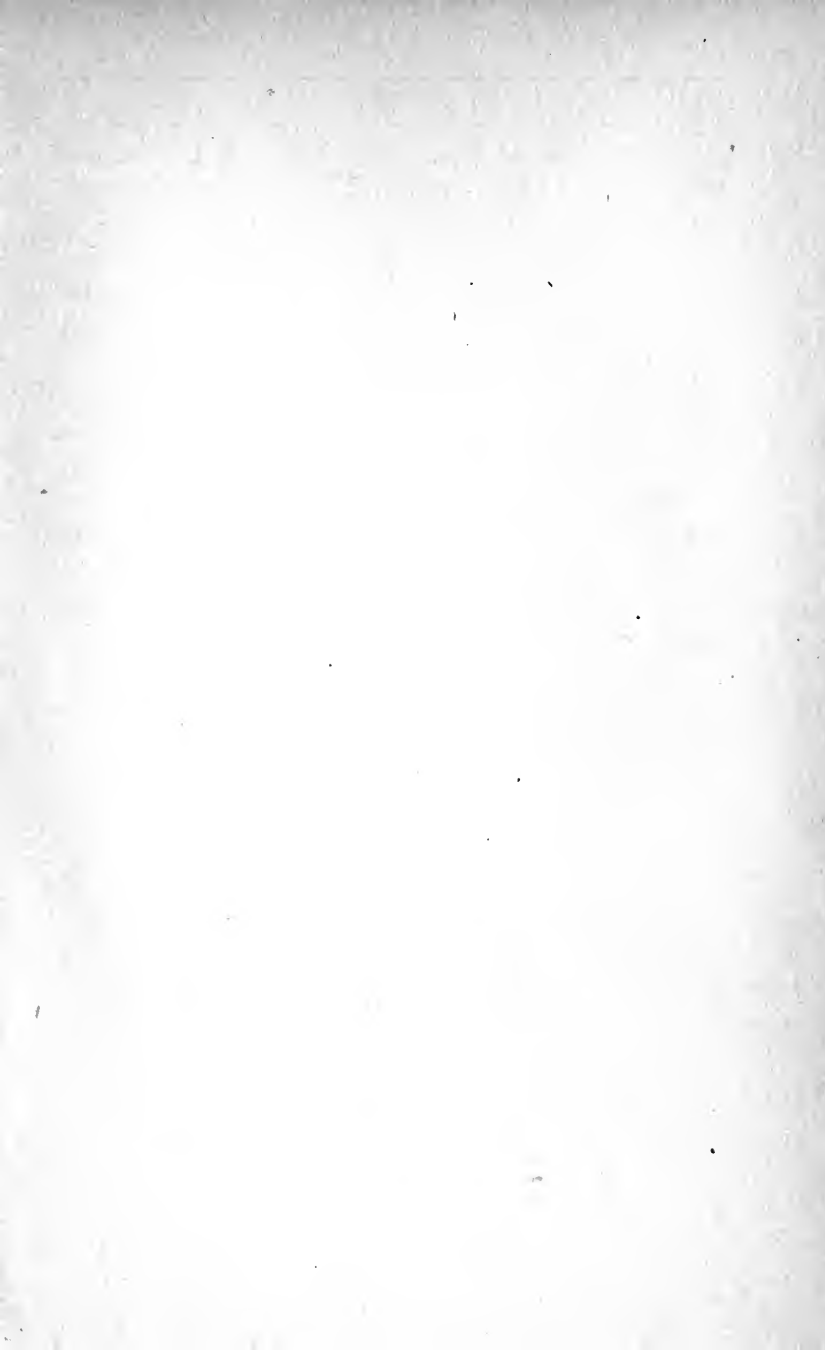
"Mary," Q whispered, "I had to ask you something. Was Sir Sydney Grinscoombe your great-great-great-grandfather, too?"

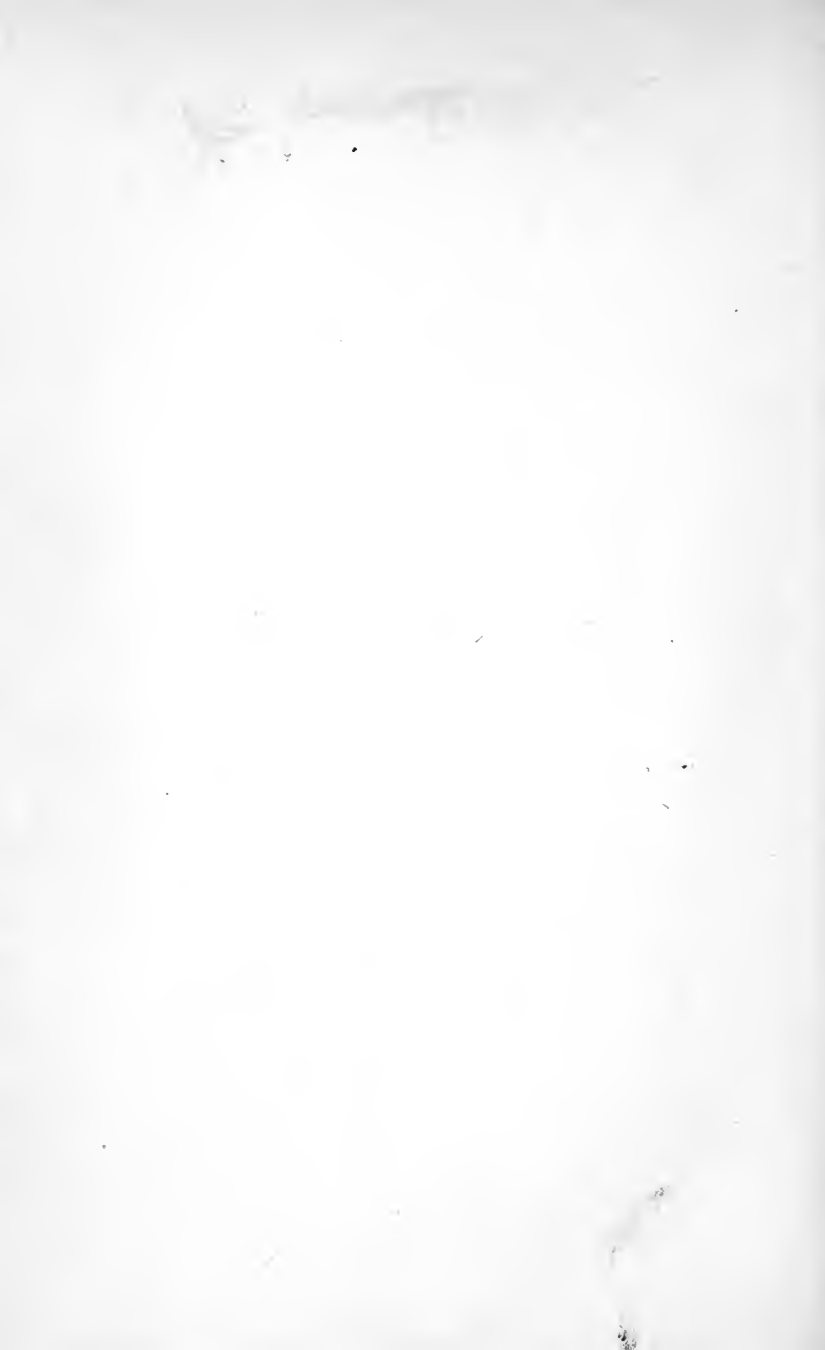
"Yes, dear." Her fingers clung a little and she smiled.

"Thank God for that!" said Q.

Triumph for an instant conquered the serene contentment of his face.

THE END





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